

UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS - FACULTÉ DES LETTRES

BROWNING'S ENGLISH
IN
" SORDELLO "

THÈSE COMPLÉMENTAIRE POUR LE DOCTORAT ÈS-LETTRES

Présentée à la Faculté des Lettres

de l'Université de Paris

PAR

Henri HOVELAQUE

Agrégé de l'Université

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CORRIGENDA

Page	Ligne	Au lieu de	Lire
11	6	<i>carelesness</i>	carelessness
23	3	<i>wind</i>	win
27	28	<i>now</i>	not
37	24	<i>less</i>	least
40	10	<i>Coriolanns</i>	Coriolanus
50	7	<i>Vénus et Adonis</i>	Venus and Adonis
59	13	<i>yoo</i>	too
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73	30	<i>quoted that already</i>	that is already quoted
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146	4	<i>Shakespearan</i>	Shakespearian
146	4	<i>esseniallty</i>	essentially
166	15	<i>conflic titself</i>	conflict itself



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La Faculté n'entend donner aucune approbation ni improbation aux opinions émises dans les thèses ; ces opinions doivent être considérées comme propres à leurs auteurs.



A Monsieur R. HUCHON

en

Hommage de reconnaissance

Browning's English in "Sordello"

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PREFACE

« *Sordello* » has been generally looked upon as one of the most obscure of all Browning's works.

Up to the present it has been subjected to an almost wholesale condemnation, alike by critics and readers (1), the grammar and style are so peculiar, they alledge, that a general obscurity pervades the poem.

Not only has this accepted point of view deterred very many people from attempting to penetrate the real meaning and significance of the work but it has proved particularly detrimental to Browning's reputation (2).

Furthermore a misleading conception has resulted with regard to the *thought* contained therein, some (3) denying even the existence of such, while others have distorted it in no small measure. This perhaps is even more unfortunate than the fact of having condemned the book, if we see that Browning, as a thinker, ranks higher than is generally imagined, and that he implicitly claimed, in respect to « *Sordello* », that it had important matter to impart.

However a careful examination of the book proves that not only it is possible to interpret its meaning, but that

(1) See Appendix I.

(2) From the appearance of « *Sordello* » dates the legend of Browning's obscurity.

(3) M. Elton 1924.

the author whatever his faults may be, has been more sinned against than sinning, and that he can, in a great measure, be disculpated from the chief accusations brought against him.

The best way of proceeding would appear to be a careful examination of the details of the case from the very beginning, that is to say, go back to 1835, or 1840, and see what really happened when the work was composed.

Immediately after the appearance of « *Paracelsus* », in 1835, Browning was furnished with an explanation of its failure that caused him no small amount of surprise. The public, he was informed, had found fault with its apparent *verbosity*.

Now, not only Browning himself, but also his best friends knew very well that in this case the public was in the wrong, for « *Paracelsus* » was not in reality « verbose » as people fancied, but simply very rich in metaphor and a passionate, symbolical style of writing. The mistake that they made was a grave one, for the whole and indiscutable originality of the work lay above all in the fact that it was, in every point, a new and striking departure in literature.

However the young poet who was too modest and painstaking at heart not to endeavour at once to comply with the wishes of his readers, immediately set to work to put his style more in accordance with their views. He took what he imagined would prove the most efficacious measures, « *to stop the mouths of the critics altogether* » by a general curtailing throughout his next work, namely *Sordello*, Elisions of letters, a freer use of Absolute Forms, and Elliptical sentences being the chief means he employed

towards this end. And, that he thought he had succeeded, is proved by the letter he wrote to his friend Marston in which he said : « *This time at any rate the public shall not accuse me of being unintelligible* ». Great indeed therefore was his deception when he saw that the work was received with such general disfavour.

At first he waited, thinking the public would gradually come back on its first hasty judgment, but when he saw it remained obdurate, he endeavoured to make his poem less difficult to understand, by revising it time after time in its successive editions.

By 1872 he had so far improved the work that he was able to say : « *Nor do I apprehend any more charges of being wilfully obscure, unconsciously careless or perversely harsh* ». He had already made the best of excuses in 1868. « *I can have little doubt but that my writing has been, in the main, too hard for many I should have been pleased to communicate with, but I have never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed. On the other hand, I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes to an idle man* ».

As a matter of fact very nearly all the faults existing in the first edition that he had been reproached with, had disappeared ; and, what was quite as important, his qualities had not changed.

II

There are further facts that must not be lost sight of, and we must endeavour not to fall into the same error as many critics. In the first place let us remember that he

wrote, — even as he declares in his *Preface* (1863) — « *Not for the many, but for the few* », and « counting, even in these, on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had ; that he did his best then and since ». He acknowledged too that « *his faults of expression were many*, but we know that he had already amended them greatly. Do not let us forget either, that at the time when he was composing « *Sordello* » and was endeavouring to curtail his so called « redundancy », the Public had unwittingly furnished him with an opportunity to suppress much more in a sentence than is allowable in ordinary speech, a thing that after all should have been more acceptable to a public so incensed against a « *verbosity* » that in reality with respect to « *Paracelsus* », was non-existent. These suppressions were particularly congenial, to him for they allowed his agile mind a much more rapid outpouring of his ideas, — the clipped explosive turns of speech that he made use of answering completely to his sharp, incisive, sarcastic, humorous, turn of mind. He had been induced thus to turn only too readily to Shakespeare, and to the Elizabethan writers whose terse, elliptical forms, were already his own, because he was in temperament and taste himself a man of the Renaissance. And finally the philosopher that he was, had only too poor an idea of Language, as a means of expression, not to fancy that it could be made to comply to every conception of a writer of genius. And in this respect he was not far wrong, for many of his so-called faults are to be found in writers as illustrious as himself, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson and not a few others who are nearly as great.

III

Nevertheless it must be admitted that in « *Sordello* », in spite of Browning's successive emendations and improvements there remains a residue of obscurity which baffles his readers, but far from being the result of carelessness or want of « *savoir faire* », was intentionally left, just as it was, by the author, since, from his point of view, it formed a necessary characteristic of his own peculiar thought and manner. 5/

The main mistake that has been made concerning his style lies in the fact that the preceding statements have not been taken into consideration.

If we examine « *Pauline* », « *Paracelsus* » and « *Sordello* » successively, we notice at once a growing tendency on Browning's part to create a distinctive manner of expression which he, no doubt, was not entirely aware of himself, and this is easy to understand since all three works embody forth the same ideas, and that the intensity of Browning's powers of expression grow with the intensity of his nature and convictions.

In « *Pauline* » though he is mainly satisfied with copying Shelley, whether it be in matter or in form, and though only few traces can be found of his later style of writing, yet at times, even here, there are signs of ruggedness, with some repetitions, dashes, notes of exclamation, but let us notice that there are no parentheses.

In « *Paracelsus* » however we have a sudden flowering of richness throughout the style ; metaphors and images crowd upon one another and force their way into the text almost to overflowing point : the language gains all the

more, it becomes palpitating with life and energy ; so intense and at times so highly lyrical and rhetorical that we feel the double influence of Shakespeare and Shelley to be combined therein ; though that of the first is not in any way as overwhelming as that of the second is strong ; the general tone of the style remains harmonious and almost free from ellipses.

It is only when we come to « *Sordello* » that the style becomes so peculiar, so *personal* we may say in every sense of the word. It was without any doubt because Browning, *the Poet* by definition, was exposing the point of view he had most at heart, that of the part played by Poetry and the Poet in the affairs of the world, but also because he had felt the influence of Dante and Carlyle. His temper had been sorely tried by the injustice of the public, and being called upon abruptly to condense his thought in the smallest space possible, he did not scruple to resort to every means the language afforded him to express it in a manner that he fancied would give satisfaction to his readers and at the same time to himself.

IV

A double intention underlies the two main causes of his apparent failure.

For indeed if we take the trouble to read the various criticisms of which « *Sordello* » has been so often the object (1) we find that they may be conveniently brought under three heads :

(1) See Appendix I.

A) Fault has been found on one hand with his :

Condensed style of writing, which comprises *Ellipses*, and other curtailed forms, such as suppressions not only of letters, but of *words*, and even of *sentences*, in short, of certain excess in the employment of **synthetical forms** ;

B) On the other hand with his :

Prolixity, which comprises *Repetitions* of words and sentences ; *Antitheses* (or balancing of terms one against another) ; lengthy *descriptions* ; learned or ambiguous *Allusions* with *Rare, Archaic or Out-of-the-way terms* dragged into the text without any apparent use ;

C) Finally with what is supposed to be a general **Carelessness** concerning : *Punctuation, Spelling and Grammar*, orderly *Arrangement* of matter or thought.

The whole resulting, as the critics alledge, in a certain confusion, or **Obscurity**.

In seeking to *disculpate Browning*, one's main endeavour should, we fancy, be to examine each of these points separately, so as to see how far he is really to blame in each case.

Now this will be rendered easier if we reflect, first of all, that *language* is the inseparable shadow of *thought*, and if we seek — as did the Greeks — to find, in its *structure* and *parts*, replicas of the substance and moulds of a writer's thought, in order to penetrate into the workings of his mind and to learn something of their nature as well as of the *laws* at the basis of his written expression. In a word the main tendency of our study should be *psychological* especially when it concerns such a writer as Robert

Browning, who is preeminently a « subtle, soul-psychologist », as Shelley (1) would have called him.

For in every respect language and, consequently, style, is an emanation of a soul, a bodying-forth of the mental workings in any individual creature and should therefore at no time be considered as an independent mechanism outside ourselves. Human Speech is but a compromise between two opposing tendencies elsewhere discernible in man : That, on one hand of :

a) the effort to practise *economy* of Expression ;

b) and on the other hand that of endeavouring to indulge in *prodigality* of Expression.

Each can be explained : the first by the desire to express one's self as briefly, and, at the same time as comprehensively as possible ; the last by fear one may not be understood, or by the wish *to drive in one's meaning*, so that there may be no doubt left in the reader's mind.

It remains therefore to be seen :

If *Economy of Expression* (2) is entirely reprehensible : if it is not very often as has been aptly said « *the soul of wit* » if, too, it may not particularly suit a mind like that of Browning which is rapid, subtle, vigorous, in the extreme.

On the other hand, we may ask ourselves if *Redundancy* in some cases, is not only inevitable, but commend-

(1) In speaking of Coleridge.

(2) The constant omission of the relative « that » in English is one of the commonest illustrations. It must not be forgotten that Browning thought he would *satisfy the public* by compressing his thought into the smallest space possible.

able, seeing that people are not always in a state of mental alertness, sufficient to grasp a thought *unless it is emphasised*. And finally if it is not eminently suitable for earnest and passionate natures such as that of the poet whose work we have to examine.

V.

In the following pages our endeavour has been therefore, less to make an exhaustive study of Browning's English in « *Sordello* », such an attempt exceeding the purpose and dimension of a thesis, than to point out at least the main characteristics of his Grammar and Style, and to show that it is perhaps not impossible to excuse the residue of defects that remain in his language, when once his motives and meaning have been rendered apparent.

CHAPTER ONE

ECONOMY OF EXPRESSION

a) **Ellipses**

b) **Elisions, Absolute Forms**

CHAPTER THE FIRST

ECONOMY OF EXPRESSION

a) Ellipses

Ellipses, in Browning's « Sordello » seem at first sight to be still more numerous than they are. In reality it is their frequent repetition which deceives the reader ; and makes him fancy their number to be greater than it is. With a little attention he soon becomes accustomed to them. In any case they can be brought down to a definite number.

We may consider first of all :

- § I. Those that occur in each part of Speech ;
and secondly,
- § II. Those that are a form of what is already known in English Grammar under the name of *Non-Répétition* of words already used.

SECTION I

ELLIPSES IN PARTS OF SPEECH

I. ADJECTIVE :

Ellipses of the first « as » in comparative degree,

Richard light hearted as a plunging star (1-174)

= as light-hearted...

Possessive : a) *His* festered lips and (his) eyeballs (IV-873)
 b) *His* fears and hopes, *his* Emperors and Popes (his) Cares and (his) contrivances (IV-424/25).
 c) The knowledge that you are a bard
 Must constitute your prime, nay (your) sole reward
 (II-819).

II. ADVERB : How Salinguerra extricates (how), Ghibellin
 and Guelf may fight ? (VI-636).

III. ARTICLE :

A) Definite

Browning suppresses *The* :

a) Before common nouns in the singular :

air clears V. 159 = the air, cf. V. 205 : « *Take next step, next age* »

cf. 228 : « *The next age* »

Core with its crust = *The* core

cf. Milton : Under (the) amazement of their hideous
 change 1 313.

b) Before Proper nouns : in the singular :

His hand like Brenta or Bacchiglion IV 88

= *The* Brenta, *The* Bacchiglion

In the plural : Mantuans II 628 = The Mantuans.

cf. (The) Guelfs VI 685.

c) In appositions :

Ecelo, dismal father of the brood I 458

= *The* dismal

The hungry curlew or serpent II 459

= *The* serpent

Carried above the firs, clouds III 206

= *the* clouds

(N.B. In the last sentence, the sense may be general)
cf. III 241 ; III 267 ; III 539, and especially « *licence* »
he demands, III 543 = *the licence that*.

d) Before gerund :

Would promote . . .

Alcarno to holding of her lord's stirrup V 409
= to *the* holding.

B) Indefinite :

a) Apposition : Adelaide recluse no longer I 995 = *a*
recluse. (He was a) true bard II 497 cf. IV 649 and V 444
They lose themselves in that, means to an end V 444
a means

Why such performance should exact applause II 148
= such *a* performance

At price of past gain, bar of fresh increase IV 649.
= which was *a* bar.

(A) plaything of page or girl II 518

Proved (an) imposture II 946

(a) point not realized ? III 34

(a) Myriad ages III 612

(It is a) pity to disconcert V 102

b) Object : Heaved (a) sigh III 1010

c) After *so* and *such*

So opportune (an) effect IV 400 cf. II 140

Such (a) niggard stock III 706

d) In adverbial forms :

At (an) end V 911

With (a) coruscating dower IV 318

Compare = Creeping like snail unwillingly to school
Shakespeare.

IV. CONJUNCTIONS :

Ellipses of Conjunctions

In Browning they are suppressed only once (1)

And : Very often Browning suppresses « *and* » between his sentences even when there are three of them following one another : e.g. Dropped the mask, flung, foreswore (and) had no mind I 195

He also suppresses it after *go* : e.g. Go shout VI 55.

But : How Taurello lost... I told, not how he bore the blow IV 547 = *but* not...

A healthy spirit craves aliment, all the same changes V 437 = *but* all the same changes

For what is Joy, to heave VI 261 = *but* to heave

Stronger vision could endure no part,

The whole of Truth VI 745 = *but* the whole, etc...

If : Ellipsis after *as*

As (if) in the slumberous heart of the woods II 4

As (if) aware IV 541

As (if) perfect triumph were not sure for all VI 807

That : Suppose not (that) I reject I 55

What informed the boy (that) others... II 685

The end was (that) he retailed and (that) he

put to use... and (that) he ventured I 750

Thereby : Thrust Beauty then aside and banish evil : VI 239 and *thereby* etc...

Though : And body, may with spirit helping, barred VI 543 though barred.

Advance the same, vanquished, obtain reward,

= though vanquished, VI 544.

(1) With the exception of « *that* ».

Why : The reason (why) Father Porphyry took I 306.

While : (While you are) discovering this, discover too II 417.

V. NOUN : Nature` has time (Nature) may mend mistake
On this hand, while Alexander, Innocent, uphold on
that (hand) V. 183-187.

VI. PREPOSITIONS :

After (with sense of according to) :

(After) Naddo's fashion II 745

At : In adverbial forms of time and place :

(At) last he lay II 992

(At) first fresh, IV 79

By : a) In adverbial forms :

(By) one grain, by one shade I 435

b) Before present participle :

And, (by) striving, be admired II 448

(By) learning save that (life) III 98

During : In questions of time (cf. « *For* »)

(During) this long while IV 287

(During) the last age V 40

(During) a double watch V 277

(During) this wearisome siege V 288

(During) the next age V 601

(During) nine days VI 644

For :

a) In questions of time

(For) a week I 156

(For) fifty years IV 816

For one moment IV 1012

b) after « *as* »

As (for) our Taurello 1 940

c) before noun : Might wind (for) the people V 665

d) After certain verbs :

Care (for) II 221 (followed by « *take counsel for* »)

Sufficed (for) the Paulician II 865

(For) whom deeds once sufficed V 549

Sufficed (*for*) young Ecelin V 976

I hardly hoped for III 254

From :

a) In *adverbial* forms :

(From) head to foot IV 773 (From) near and (from) {a}
far I 853

b) after *apart*

When *apart* (from) the boaster V 950

c) After certain verbs :

Banished (*from*) Antioch III 992

Hindered (from) crashing down IV 405

Slipping (away) (from) us IV 752

In :

a) In adverbial expressions (manner, time, and place)

(In) which way IV 833 cf. (in) no way diverse V 562

(In) some strange way I 456 cf. Bless me (in) my own
way VI 418 Cf. spend my own way IV 806 = in my
own way.

(In) the first way III 576 cf. (In) this way VI 862

(In) the rear or (in) the van III 248

b) When it is combined with order = in order to

(In order) to wear IV 833

Of :

a) In adverbial expressions :

(On) this side (of) the Alps IV 715 cf. V 789

In the midst (of) that) V 126

(Of) what avail II 76

b) after *worthy* :

Worthy (of) her imperial style II 914

c) after *within a tether* :

Within a tether (of) half the range III 190

d) after the Gerund :

The substituting (of) osier V 33.

Off : after the verb leave :

Left (off) playing V 357.

On : a) In questions of *time* ;

(On) the day that those archers worked I 659

(On) that eve I 752

(On) that earnest April morn III 349

(On) the day that I was betrothed III 507

(On) the next day V 450

(On) one grey morn V 980

(On) this moonrise V 1013

b) of *manner* :

(On) the contrary I 57

c) In questions of *place*

(On) every side I 958 cf. II 21 ; IV 267 ; III 666

d) After certain *verbs* :

Night wears (on) I 310

I muse (on) this III 676

Bent (on) IV 449

Trampled (on) V 501

Out : After certain *verbs* :

So it fell (out) that IV 515

Blots (out) Heaven V 158

I point (out) IV 801

To : a) before the *indirect object* :

Sent (to) Henry this fair child VI 664

delivered (to) them II 720

A blasted bud displays (to) you III 217

This is conceded (to) you III 480

Her Piedmont given (to) the Pope III 489

Why detail (to) you ? IV 615

With : In absolute constructions :

(With) shoulders purpled and (with) diffused hair I 403

(With) thick black shade about the ceiling

cf. I 160 ; I 417 ; I 440 ; II 35, 36 ; etc., etc...

VII. PRONOUNS :

1) *Personal*

a) Subject

(We) slouch bonnet (we) unloop mantle III 756

Between blue and blue (it) extends III 724

(It) little boots beholding I 717

b) Before reflexive pronoun :

(I) who change no standards of perfection II 435

(He) who will may hear Sordello's story I 1

cf. Coleridge « As who (Ancient Mariner.)

(They) themselves turn you V 535

That (they) whom (it) behoves III 292

2) *Indefinite*

« One » after *this*

This (one) of ours III 843

What bids (one) choose this (one) ? VI 446

With *such*, Browning sometimes suppresses « *or such* »:

e.g. Such (or such) strength, such (or such) weakness

II 525

He also suppresses the pronoun after a preposition :
Salinguerra's prophecy at (its) height V 982
Some ideal past (our) reach on earth VI 80
Suppression of « all » before same :
I trust (all) the same my soul to Fate VI 354.

3) *Relative* :

That : Browning takes advantage of *this Ellipsis* in English far more than most writers do. The examples are consequently innumerable.

That :

a) replacing subject :

The lute string (that was) named II 68
(A) point that was inordinately prized II 36
One (that was) a slave II 357

b) replacing direct object :

A story (that) I could body forth so well I 14
The bulb (that) Taurello sent III 221
The flock of steeples (that) he might espy IV 34

What

Then (what) a sorrow to the heart (was) his talk ! II 717

4) *Reflexive*

(They) (themselves) abide profounder simpletons II 818
Alters (itself) quite I 635
Beholding other creature's attributes
And having none (ourselves) I 719
Style yourself, Strangle (yourself) II 422

VIII. VERB

A) AUXILIARY

3) *To be*

The world's occasion (is) worthless, since (it is) not

absolutely fitted I 560

Her presence (is) wholly poured (1) I 334

(There are) nor mutes nor masquers now I 327

(*It were*) best (to) turn, (to) submit V 399

What marvel ? (*would there be* ?) VI 368

-As (was) the sea I 360

(Being) foiled of its radiant chance I 521

After « *wherefore* »

Wherefore (should I) twist ? I 894

Who believes me shall behold (*shall*) pursue I 3

This lay was lost, (*was*) polished (*was*) completed II 272

Impersonal form :

Straight (there was) a meeting of old men IV 495

4) *To have*

Perchance the vaunt (had) come to pass I 275

Meantime (let us have) some pyx I 590

Had to be groped for and (*had to be*) delivered II 720

There are also particular cases in which Browning suppresses certain Auxiliary verbs :

I) *Can* is often suppressed after *How*, *how* else :

How else (can we) suppress ? I 837

How else (can they) rebut us ? II 211

II) *Do* is suppressed :

1) In interrogative forms

(Do you) seek creatures ? VI 101

(Did) Sordello die at once ? VI 823

Don't I know Ecelin ?

And (did I now know him) years ago ? IV 843

(1) This is not correct as the plural « are » had been employed in the preceding line.

2) After *why* ?

Then *why* (did he) stop ? II 531

3) After *used* :

How they *used* (to do) IV 962

4) To replace a former verb :

Men no more compete... than tree or flower (did) II 280

Flinch... as (did) Elys V 256

Waxing and waning as (did) the host of fancies I 653

5) After *nor* with the sense of neither :

Nor (neither) (do) I lament *nor* (do I) reconstruct V 640

2) Ellipses of *Have* after *Once* :

Once Jove (*had*) trined for her IV 603

Once you (*have*) bid marauders pack IV 783

Once the Empery (*has*) devolved IV 789

2) Impersonal Forms :

(*There are*) *nor* mutes *nor* masquer now I 327

B) ORDINARY VERB :

Call him no flower (*call* him) a mandrake rather V 173

That binds the Trevisan as its spice belt (*binds*) III 548

Este required the Pope to further him

And you (*required*) the Kaiser (to *further* you) III 483

or :

But not of force to bind

Eternity, as Time (*binds*) as Matter (*binds*) Mind IV 474

Browning sometimes carries this very far, e.g. :

The Troubadour forgot its trick, his tongue ; its craft,
his brain ; how either brought to pass singing III 76

= The Troubadour forgot, his tongue (*forgot*) its trick,
His brain (*forgot*) its craft ; (he himself *forgot*) how
either brought singing to pass.

C) ELLIPSIS OF *To* BEFORE INFINITIVE (1)

In English it is usual to suppress, before an Infinitive, the preposition « *To* », after :

- a) Auxiliary or Defective verbs
- b) Verbs of Perception
- c) Bid, Dare, let etc...

Now Browning, not only, follows this rule, but he also suppresses the preposition in many other cases, e.g. :

- I) After verbs that can be considered as having the *same sense* as auxiliary or defective verbs : *Allow, Authorize, Command*, etc...
- II) After certain *comparative* and *superlative* forms : *Better, Best, so far as, so much as* etc...
- III) *After : how, why, bound, enough, fain.*
- IV) After : *To begin, to care, to come, to contrive, to deign, to fail, to have leave, to intend, to manage, to make (in passive form), to manage, to mean, to offer, to prepare.*
- V) After certain *impersonal* forms : *It is time, it is worth while.*
- VI) After Verbs of Perception other than those generally used, e.g. *to discover, to seem.*
- VII) When the preposition has been used once before.
 - I) After verbs that can be considered as having somewhat the same sense as certain Auxiliary or Defective Verbs : e.g. (to bid ; to dare ; to let ; to make ;)
- (1) We have classed this paragraph with the verb as it is an Ellipsis of the preposition which belongs to the verb in the infinitive.

a) To *counsel* ; = *to bid*

Counsel it (to) slumber I 554

b) To *presume* ; = *to dare*

to *venture* ; = *id.*

He scare *prêsumes* (to) gainsay IV 53

He *ventured* (to) push VI 145 cf. II. 750

c) To *allow* ;

to *empower* ;

to *suffer* ;

} = *to let*

Allowed the rest (to) detect III 889

Empowered the losel (to) clutch III 795

Suffer light (to) filter I 407 cf. III. 536 ; III 608 ;

d) To *compel* ;

to *force* ;

to *oblige* ;

} = *to make*

Compel my liegeman (to) obey his lord V 474

Forcing our straightened sphere (to) contain it I 564

Oblige them (to) recognise II 570

II. After Comparative and Superlative forms :

a) It were) *better* (to) think II 833

Best (to) sleep II 264

It were) *filliest* (to) maintain VI 209

b) So *far* as (to) grudge III 520

Not so *much* as (to) learn II 620

Much less (to) set forth VI 634

c) As easy (to) counsel VI 626

III. After :

a) How ; b) *why* ; c) *be bound* ; d) *enough* ; e) *fain*.

a) *How* (to) divine II 147 (this is confusing, as *divine* may also be adj.)

b) *Why* bend ? I 644

c) The single service I am *bound* (to) effect V 655

d) Adorable *enough* (to) reclaim II 681

e) *Fain* (to) upgather IV 237 cf. I 490 *Fain* invest

a) *bis* Yet, elsewhere we find :

How *to* do ? IV 295

e) *bis* cf. *fain to fly* I 128

IV. After to begin ; to care ; to chose ; to come ; to contrive ; to deign ; to fail ; (to have) leave ; to intend ; to manage ; to make ; to frame ; (in passive form) to mean ; to offer ; to seek ; to persuade ; to please ; to prepare ; to seek.

e.g.

She threw back her curls and *began* (to) implant III 309

No wind that *cared* (to) trouble II 71 cf

to *chose* (to) await V 463

came (to) join the peasants II 704

He had unconsciously *contrived* (to) forget VI 148

If we *deign* (to) accept V 969

Failed Adelaide (to) see then V 765

The whole music it was *framed* (to) afford VI 530

Leave (to) command III

Where sorrow was *intended* (to) grow VI 542

We'll *manage* (to) reinstate II 785 cf. III 785

Made (to) fold or (to) fly III 373

Verona *means* not (to) break tryst III 294

I *offer* (to) unveil IV 616

Perhaps *persuade* him (to) wrest V 197

Pleased (to) accept them IV 662

Just as they *prepare* (to) ascend VI 815

Its good you *sought* (to) keep me III 726

V. Impersonal forms : It is *time* ; It is *worth while*

It is *time* (to) explain II 868

Have *time* (to) subside VI 329

It was not *worth while* (to) oppose II 833

Suppose it were *worth while* (to) frustrate IV 810

VI. After verbs of Perception, other than those generally used : e.g.

Discovered a prize (to) lurk V 142

Though his proportions *seemed* (to) aspire V 746

VII. Suppression of the preposition when it has been used once before

To talk, (to) call things by half names V 626

To expand (to) expatiate V 638

Made to serve (to) excel V 728

To cheer (to) drown V 763

Time (to) expostulate (to) attempt, (to) withdraw V 888

To get, (to) dispose his saint V 922

To keep or (to) cast away, (to) gather V 985

To break sympathies, (to) bear aversions VI 222

To heave and (to) leave common by

such act (to) destroy VI 263

Pages to dice with, (to) help, (to) displace,

(to) laugh, (to) break VI 405

To sway, or (to) obey VI 451

To stem the ruin even yet, (to) protract to supply VI 539

Free to go, (to) inspect, (to) pretend, (to) observe VI 747

SECTION II

NON REPETITION

As a general rule it may be said that Browning always suppresses a word :

- I. When it has been once used or can be easily supplied by the context
- II. When he judges that its suppression will give greater brevity or more intensity of style, thus :

III. ARTICLES :

a) Definite :

The Asolan and (the) Euganean hills I 259
Learn the true relationship (the)
core with its crust I 703

b) Indefinite :

(A) plaything of (a) page and (a) girl II. 518.

IV. CONJUNCTION :

1) And :

Dropped the mask (and) flung and foreswore

2) That :

On discovering that to twist etc...

Each too intent for noticing (that) the conqueror
would have etc... (IV-5/10)

Before *subjunctive* mood :

Careful (that) Jove's face be V 43

Escapes there still... a proof (that) the singer's life
was neath, (that) passion smouldered etc. III 628

Which means to say (that) the whole's removed (and)
(that) it is) dismantled. III 850

Compare IV 273 : It followed *that... that* this, and *that* (280) where Browning repeats the conjunction, time after time, wishing to insist.

V. NOUNS :

- 1) The Asolan and Euganean *hills*, the Rhetian and the Julian (hills) I-259

The *day's* adventure for the day suffice

And leave time for the next (day) at ease I 628

Rome of the Capitol, (Rome) of Castle Angelo IV-1014

Whole inheritance of *opportunities* while you advance upon the last (opportunity) V 299/300

This *badge* alone makes you, (this *badge*) becomes V-721

- 2 (I) who have run these fingers through those pale *locks* II-157

(I) who first could clutch, then praise (those pale *locks*)

Why like some spectral candlestick's (*arms*) branch the disciple's arms ? (d) III-1008

- a) At times, Browning, very adroitly, makes a single noun do duty for two, by throwing it to the end of second sentence e.g.

With his own (*qualities*)

joining the qualities that, etc... I-628/631

If (it is) not the best (*expedient*)

Yet (it) is not the worst expedient

Or, with the plural understood in the first case :

All (posts) save one post III-694

Who, not privy to, abhors, our (step) IV-493

V bis. PREPOSITIONS

- a) *About* Sordello's paradise, (about) his roves II-269

Whether *on* trees or (on) men his thoughts were bent
IV-449

To corridors (*to*) vault, (*to*) the maple-chamber, (*to*)
the nooks I-617

b) before infinitive :

Real eyes *to* glisten more, real brows (*to*) turn

VI. PRONOUNS :

Indefinite :

1) Some sound or (*some*) sight II 204

2) With a finished one, what it can do all But this (*one*)
of ours... II 843

Personal :

a) (subject)

1) I take the task (*I*) show (*I*) lay, stress (*I*) make (*I*)
suppose V 586

2) Thou hast life then (*thou*) wilt challenge life I 549

3) He cannot chose but sing, so, (*he*) quite Mantua II 936

b) (direct object)

1) Then say if you condemn me or acquit (*me*) III 990

2) Wedded (*him*) and turned him wicked I 944

3) With them as he had hoped to be without (*them*) IV 205

Relative :

1) Whose words, not (*whose*) actions

2) Crippled idiot who recounts and (*who*) wriggles round
V 270

Reflexive

1) Style yourself God, strangle (*yourself*) II 422

2) Beholding other creatures' attributes

And having none (*himself*) I 719

3) Displayed himself so far as displayed these (*themselves*)

VIII. VERBS

1) Auxiliaries :

Who believes me *shall* behold... (*shall*) pursue I 3
How *should* this deject, these ? wherefore (*should*)
strength 'be quelled ? I 537

The end *is* piteous but, much between (*is*) pleasant
I 588-9

One *may* anticipate, (*may*) rehearse I 846

This lay *was* lost (*was*) polished (*was*) completed II 272

Had to be groped for... and (*had to be*) delivered II 720

Would hush or (*would*) bring and (*would*) exempt
IV 412

So much they should (*do*) so little they can *do* IV 852

Would rock and now (*would*) chuckle IV 643

Now *would* make, now (*would*) cringe IV 649

2) Ordinary verb :

Word *make leap* out word, rhyme (*made leap* out) rhyme
II 86

Our poet... *lost* his rank (*lost*) life II 242.

Este *required* the Pope to *further* him and you (required)
the Kaiser (to *further* you) III 483

That *binds* the Trevisan as its spice-belt (*binds*) III 548

Their rule *confessed* its rule, their interest (*confessed*)
its interest V 146.

Call him no flower (*call* him) a mandrake rather V 173.

N.B. At times it is the 1st verb that is suppressed :

(*Flock*) about me faces : and they *flock* V 579

3) Impersonal form :

I think *there lies* more than one corpse

(*there lies*) another cinder IV 748.

After *whence* : whence (*there came*) a just rebuke II 9

SUMMING UP OF PARAGRAPHS CONCERNING ELLIPSES

We see from the preceding paragraphs that Browning has made a considerable use of Ellipses, as the main means of avoiding prolixity.

In defence of his so doing it may be said that he was justified in a measure for, at times, but at times only, there had been some passages in his preceding work « *Paracelsus* », that would seem at first sight somewhat redundant, But in reality the public had not realised that Browning's apparent, prolixity ie., his repetitions and emphases were, more often than not, well in keeping with the vehement style of that poem. With characteristic generosity and modesty he endeavoured in his new work, « *Sordello* », to trim and clip his style — unfortunately a little more than was necessary —, and this curtailing exposed him only to fresh and still less merciful criticism.

For indeed it may be seen that he has not so entirely violated the English language as has always been supposed.

English in fact is a language where brevity is not only often considered the « soul of wit », as for instance in cutting sayings, especially (even as is the case in Latin) (1) and in proverbs, such as : « *Less said, soonest mended* », « *Waste not, want not* », but the very genius of the language (revealing the main characteristics of the average Englishman) consists in terseness and energy. « Few words and to the point » are, in Shakespeare's country generally

(1) For instance in Latin ; *Procax Fugax, Fugax Procax*.

considered the most important thing in speaking as well as in writing.

Now Browning was an Elizabethan in *taste* as well as in *temperament*, so the conciseness and strength of Shakespeare, the energy of Milton, had, with time and study, become his own manner of expressing his thought.

Consequently what we condone in them we should not condemn entirely in him.

Again it must not be forgotten that there is another reason why Browning trims and curtails language ruthlessly at times : namely because of his contempt for language as a means of conveying perception or thought. And in this matter he was, from a philosophical point of view, quite right (1).

Therefore we purpose, in the next few pages, first of all to show briefly that pretty nearly all the Ellipses with which Browning is reproached can be found either in Milton's or in Shakespeare's or in Tennyson's works.

VARIOUS ELLIPSES USED BY BROWNING IN « SORDELLO »
THAT ARE TO BE FOUND IN SHAKESPEARE

A. ELLIPSES

a) Ellipsis of Article.

1) Definite

Best safety lies in fear : Hamlet I 3, 41

(1) See passage in *Sordello* :

*Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
As language : thought may take perception's place
But hardly coexist in any case
Being its mere presentment of the Whole,
By Parts, the Simultaneous and the Sole
By the Successive and the Many etc. Bk 11 verses 590-595.*

= the best

2) Indefinite :

More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear

Midsum N.D. I, 184.

= a lark

cf Sighing like furnace ; As you like it 7, 148

b) Ellipsis of adjectival forms :

1) *Of the first « as » in comparative forms :*

He pants and looks pale as if a bear were at his heels.

Twelfth Night, 4, 323 ; (*cf. Tempest* V. I. 289)

= as pale

c) Ellipsis of *Pronoun*

Subject

« (It) shall not be long but I'll be here again »

Macbeth IV, 2, 23

He will not hear till (he) feel

Timon of Athens II, 2, 7

of Pronoun and auxiliary verb.

For woman's fear and love holds quantity

In neither (is) caught, or (it is) in extremity

Hamlet III - 2 - 78

of Pronoun, verb, and adjective ;

Be guilty of death, since (thou art guilty)

of my crime. (Rape of Lucrece)

d) Ellipsis of Auxiliary verb.

On their sustaining garments (there is) a blemish

Tempest I - 2 - 219

e) Ellipsis of Preposition :

Most ignorant of what he is most assured (of)

Measure for Measure II, 2, 119

B. NON REPETITION

1) of Noun

*Saints do not move, though (saints) grant for prayer's
sake* *Romeo and Juliet* I - 5 - 107

2) Of verb.

Get I must not, but (I must) wait.

Macbeth II - 1 - III

I'll lean upon one crutch

Ere (I will) stay behind this business

Coriolanns I i, 246

3) Of Preposition.

To see sad sights moves more than (to) hear them told

Rape of Lucrece, 451.

BROWNING'S ELLIPSES COMPARED TO MILTON'S

Ellipses, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, are quite as frequent and even freer than Browning's in *Sordello* :

ELLIPSIS

1) of Article

Definite

Under (the) amazement of their hideous change I 313

2) of Pronoun :

They heard and (they) were abashed I 331

3) of verb

a) Auxiliary : (To be)

*Though of their names (there be) no memorial
farthest from him is best* I 362

b) Ordinary :

Whence (came) true authority in man

No light (came) I 63

c) Absolute forms. *The uplifted spear* I 347

N. B. Many examples could be given also of his Elisions eg. : 'scape (Nor did Israel scape) of *Inversions*, *Him the Ammonites worship* I 1395) etc. etc.

TENNYSON'S ELLIPSES COMPARED WITH BROWNING'S

N. B. Tennyson's « *Brook* » appeared almost at the same time (1842) as Browning's « *Sordello* » 1840.

If we examine Tennyson's « *Brook* » we shall find most of Browning's *Ellipses* (1) eg.

Conjunction : We say (that) they flourished (13)

(And) for which (18)

(While) Travelling to Naples (27)

Pronoun (Personal) (It) only touched

(He) thought it a dead thing (7)

before reflexive : Yet (he) himself (8).

Preposition : Or even (in) the sweet half English air (20).

Auxiliary verb : And nothing (is) perfect (16)

And mellow metres (were) (5)

Ordinary verb : And he (started) for Italy (3)

NON REPETITION :

Definite article : Where the brook and (the) river meet (31)

Verb : But Philip chattered more than brook or bird (chatter) (33)

Auxiliary : Her eyes (were) a bashful azure and her hair (was) like the chestnut (35).

Numeral Adj. Of one name and (of one) heart (39)

Person. Pronoun. I parted... (I) crossed (42) and (I) passed (44) etc. etc...

(1) (the number refers to the verse).

b) Absolute Forms

Absolute constructions are very frequent in Browning : this was to be foreseen since his main endeavour, to please his public was to *condense* his style as far as possible, and he found in the language innumerable examples of which he not only made use but forged some others on their model (1).

§ 1) *Verb « To BE » understood*

That moment past (I-21) That moment being past
Twine and tangle thrown (I-208) Having been thrown
Dim galleries got past (I-394) Having been got past
Thrice selected (I-854) Having been selected thrice
Trouble spared (I-727) Trouble being spared
Apollo still (I-912) He being still Apollo
The cloud dispatched (I-919) The cloud having been dispatched
As but suspended (I-950) As *if* it *were* but suspended
Not at their beck (II-165) Not being at their beck
A scanty company (II-187) They being a scanty company
His youth (being) at its prime now (II-43)
He stealthily at watch the while. He being etc... (II-69)
The people's frank applause half done (II-79) being half done
Above themselves, ~~not~~ beneath me (Being) Above themselves etc. (II-160)
One mild flame (III-601) Being nothing but a mild flame
Thyself put aside (III-609) Thyself being etc...

- (1) Remark that even in French, where Elliptical forms run counter to the clearness of the language many such forms are to be found e.g. ; *Somme toute* ; *tout bien considéré* ; *Avec ça ! Pensez-vous ! A d'autres ! etc...*

He in its, or its in him (III-621) He being etc..

He in the midst (IV-814) He being in the midst
 Dreams abjured (II-490) Dreams having been abjured
 Green as ever (IV-824) Which was as green as ever
 Grim prizers (V-168) Who were grim prizers
 The veil rent (V-102) The veil being rent
 Its service o'er (V-234) Its service being o'er
 Raised an inch (V-256) having been raised an inch
 Once proved its debtor (V-337) When once it had been
 proved

The poor part abandoned thus (V-347) having been abandoned

He there (V-471) He being there
 Good things assigned (V-512) Good things having been
 assigned

Once Adelaïde set on (IV-565) Once A. had been set on
 Wiles and tricks exhausted (IV-403) having been
 Patience thus abused (IV-665) Having been...

So, no rash procedure (IV-687) Let there be

If released (IV-705) If he were released

Men's first dismay abated somewhat (IV-486) Having been
 abated

Troubles raised and troubles quelled, (IV-817), having been
 quelled

Each purpose ordered right (VI-564) having been

Sordello gone (VI-638) Being once gone

It should be noticed that sometimes — but very rarely —

Browning inserts the verb « to be » in an absolute
 form, i.e.

This much *being* firm based (V-160)

§ 2) *Verb* to have *understood*

Dwindled of late years (II-978) That had dwindled etc...
 Azzo then to do with (V-494) He would then have to do
 with Azzo
 Once Jove trined for her (IV-603) Once Jove had trined.

§ 3) *As Exclamations :*

Suppressions are more frequent with Interjectional sentences as the note of surprise, terror, admiration, would be weakened by long sentences, e. g.

My audience ! (1-49) See my audience ! (cf. 44)
 The Emperor to come ! (1-205) Is to come.
 Here no rescue ! (1-821) Here there was no rescue !
 Crosses to the breech (I-843) Carry your crosses.
 Strange ! (I-181) How strange it is !
 The startling spectacle ! (II-38) That it was
 How strange ! (II-119) It was
 And home again ! (II-192) And let us get home again
 Well for him ! (II-120) *It would be well for him !*
 « Fortunate » ! (II-397) How fortunate a man I am !
 Fool ! (I-567) Fool that thou art !
 A stately foreigner ! (IV-828) It was a stately foreigner
 Paltry dealing ! (IV-842) (That would be) paltry dealing.
 All vain ! (IV-832) (It was) all in vain — cf. « Pauline !
 Vain ! Vain !
 My Azzo's stare ! (IV-802) Imagine Azzo's stare !
 Well for him ! (IV-838) It is well for him !
 A whim ! (V-21) It is a whim of mine.

Sometimes the exclamatory word « *what* » is suppressed ;
e.g. (What) graceful sister palms (I-405)

Or is used alone :

What ? (VI-401) = What objection do you make ?

§ 4) *As questions* :

What next ? (II-155) will happen ?

What avail ? (II-76) Of what avail was it ?

A prize ? (II-115) Had he gained a prize ?

What next ? (II-55) What (comes) next ?

Azzo better soothes our ears than Alberic ? (II-474) =

Does the word Azzo soothe etc...

§ 5) a) *Adverbial sense with verb suppressed* :

And *home* again (II-192) And let us *go* home again

Back now for Salinguerra (IV) Let us now go back for S...

Unseasonably *off* (V-349) Having *gone* off unseasonably

b) *On the model of adverbial clauses* :

Despite our bustle (IV-822) In spite of all our making (a)
bustle

§ 6) *Prepositions* : *WITH understood* :

(with) shoulders purpled (and with) hair diffused between
(I-405)

(with) one leg doubled underneath (I-890)

(with) crowds to see (II-35)

(with) her neck's warmth and all (II-105)

(with) her scented scarf around his neck (II-113)

(with) worshipping hearts about him for a wall ! (III-133)

(with) the Teeth clenched (V-165)
(with) the neck tight corded (V-166)
(with) the chin deep-trenched (V-167)

Elsewhere Other prepositions are understood, e.g. :

Fives and tens (VI-751) (by) fives and by tens
Last siege (IV-614) (during) last siege
That mad evening's style (In) that mad evening's style

§ 7) Finally, we have forms that are the exact counter-
part of the *Ablative Absolute* in Latin :

She scorning all (I-947)
Agonizing he (V-169)
Crash every screen (V-224) let every screen crash ?
Their moods according, his and Nature's (III-72)
Until, Morn breaking, he resolves (III-555)
The Kaiser helping (IV-539)
Retrude following, (IV-788)
Me guerdoned, (IV-797)

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAIN DIFFERENCES IN BROWNING'S ACCIDENCE, SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX

a) Accidence

Browning would appear at first sight, to have taken not a few liberties with English Grammar. In reality most of his so called innovations are simply forms that he has taken either from Shakespeare or other Elizabethan Writers, notably Milton.

ADJECTIVE :

1. Browning does not always follow the same order :
Less or more IV-448 = More or less.
2. He imitates Milton in separating two adjectives
Lean he grows and pale I-965
3. He uses « *Proper* » with the sense of « own » e.g. :
« *Employ that beauty for its proper sake* » I-495
cf. Shakespeare : Their *Proper* selves Tempest III-3-60
4. He uses « *more* » with an adjective of one syllable :
« Then with a step *more* light, a heart *more* large »
I-440 cf. Milton *more* glad. e.g. :
« On which the sun more glad impressed his beams »
IV-150.

PARADISE LOST

I. ADJECTIVES CONTINUED

Browning is fond of using *est* in the superlative degree with adjectives of *two* or *three* syllables imitating in this Shakespeare :

Famousest IV-364 cf. II-613 Delicatest

Notablest I-801 and IV-419

Thou, Ravishingest lady, will you pass ? III-763

II. ADVERBS :

Browning prefers using the comparative form in *ier* for adverbs instead of *more* :

The closelier = more closely II-302

Distinctlier e.g. :

We feel the bliss distinctlier V-421

= more distinctly

Likelier IV-136

Deeplier IV-283

Freelier IV-800

Profoundlier e.g. :

Then every depth profoundlier drops VI-360

= more profoundly

Plainlier IV-927

Surlier VI

etc...

He does not hesitate to forge adverbial expressions in a new way :

Linden-flowers-time-long II

He transforms Adverbs into nouns and puts them in the genitive case :

The Then's, the Now's

cf. Down sank the People's *Then*, uprose their *Now*
 This *Now* VI-335 VI-159
 Your *Now* VI-320
 Their « *Then* » VI-318

III. ARTICLE — INDEFINITE

At times the archaic form *an* is used before one
 Such *an* one I-869
 cf. Shakespeare : Have *an* wish (Pericles IV, 4, 2)
 cf. « To *such* *an* use » (Sordello V-18)

IV. NOUNS : He puts abstract words in the plural :

Beseemingnesses I-862
 Greatnesses « who began the acknowledged great-
 nes ? » V-105
 Brilliances I-358
 Reverences IV-764
 Laughters III-263
 Strengths I-863
 Strengths IV-775

V. PRONOUNS-REFLEXIVE

Are often used with personal pronouns understood :e.g.
 Yourselves shall trace (I-463) = *you* yourselves
 Their finding out themselves can work good
 = That *they* themselves I-488

VI. VERB - IMPERATIVE

In using Imperatives Browning naturally prefers the
 shorter forms :
 Affirm not IV 356

a) Semantics

I. ADJECTIVES

Browning uses adjectives in the place of abstract nouns

The *deep* of June = the depth of June

The *main* of them.

cf. Shakespeare : « A sudden *pale* usurps her cheek »

(Vénus et Adonis)

Adjectives in Superlative degree are made to play the part of an Adverbial form :

Worst : at the worst

Nay : even the worst V-23

= even putting things at the worst

II. ADVERBS :

- a) He gives a more extended sense to some adverbial expressions :

At large

What you'd say at large V-669

= at length

- b) And what assured them most 'twas fled V-784

= most of all

- c) *With instinct*

But worked no less with instinct V-857

= instinctively

III. ARTICLES

Definite

- 1) Browning sometimes introduces the French form :

Lo ! our forlorn acquaintance carry thus *the* head V-39

= their

- 2) With a note of exclamation :

He makes it take the exclamatory sense of « *What !* »

The crowding round, and offering the prize ! II-94

= *what* a crowding etc...

The bones and muscles ! IV-708

= *What* bones and what muscles he had !

3) Or, again, the sense of « *That* »

The Adelaide he scarce dared view unveiled IV-741

= *that*

cf. V-802 : Disobey the Adelaide = *That* Adelaide

Browning has a predilection for compound words, which, as Coleridge long ago remarked, run counter to the genius of the English language. However his compound Adjectives in « *Sordello* » are not far-fetched, nor are they formed in an out-of-the-way manner.

A few may be noted to show that Browning has an eye for *colour* :

Grey-streaked I-410 — *violet-dark* I-568 — *Rainbow-edged*
I-671

He borrows *fancy-free* from Shakespeare, and imitates him in forming adjectives beginning with an adverb joined to a present participle : e.g.

Up-thrust, out-staggering I 75 cf. : Upthrust V-139

cf. Shakespeare :

Hair up-staring : Tempest I-213.

N.B. — *Verbs* are formed in the same manner : Upburneth I-359 (See, further on, *nouns* : Blood-drop Balmshed, Thunder-cloud, closing-truth, Flesh-half's break — Vapour-Flag, Cluster-cord Honey-wine etc.).

One or two compound adjectives are *peculiar* :

None-the-minutest VI 595.

IV. CONJUNCTIONS

Browning uses *or, or*, for *either or* ;

nor, nor, for *neither nor* e.g.

Nor blind *nor* dumb (III-864)

N.B. This form is copied from Shakespeare.

An = *is* used for *if* e.g.

An it list (V-240)

This form is also derived from Shakespeare.

V. NOUNS

Peculiar way of forming :

Some no-time (II-663) cf. VI-207 (The) To-come.

Self-display (II-651)

= display of self.

Now as filled as teems *To-come*

If false or true 'twas spoken II-753

= what was false or true

One blood-drop VI-348

= One drop of blood

Unequal to encompassing a whole II-756

= To *the* encompassing of

He uses nouns instead of an adjective and a noun : e.g.

He swayed as in a drunkenness

= in a drunken fit.

VI. PRONOUNS

Indefinite

He gives to *somewhat* the sense of something and inversely, e.g.

Palma was found there still

Relating *somewhat* Adelaide confessed V-748

On the other hand he uses *something for* somewhat :

Old worshippers were *something* shamed II-189
He makes *such* a replace *such and such*
Such a strength, such a weakness II-525
= Such and such a strength, such and such a
weakness

VII. VERBS

He is fond, in imitation of Shakespeare, of forming
verbs with prepositions joined to the beginning which
take on an adverbial sense : e.g.

upthrust, *outstaggering* I-74

Overriot I-218

a) Syntax

I. ADJECTIVES

The usual order of *as... as* is changed

As pigmy natures as you please

= Natures as pigmy as you please.

At times « *fain* » is followed by a preposition :

Like an osprey *fain to fly* I-128

And also, at times, has no preposition after it :

Fain relinquish pedestal (II-548) cf. *fain do* II-783

The case is the same with *loath* :

I am *loath to say* II-442

Ecelin the unready, harsh and *loath* IV-585

In the comparative degree, instead of two comparatives, only one is used :

Near and nearer II-170

= nearer and nearer

He changes the place :

of *no* in : no more than :

Next day no formularies more you saw V-441

= no more than you saw figs

That of *more* in repetition

More disgust and more II-745

= more and more disgust.

With the word « *last* » he often suppresses the definite articles thus destroying the distinction existing between *last* and *the last*

Last age an acqueduct V-40

= in the last age

II. ADVERBS

He does not always place the adverb where it should be : inserts it between verb and preposition : « made *gradually* up » II 550

So = to such a degree

So fantasies could break and fritter youth ! V-364

= could *so* fritter

He inserts the adverb between the preposition *to* and the infinitive :

To patiently perform V-573

To poorly show V-558

To worthily be I-736

To rightly estimate

To nobly shake III-704

N.B. — This is in imitation of Shakespeare.

He prefers a double negative to an affirmative : *not impossible*

A preposition is used when it could be suppressed :
at unawares = *unawares*.

ADVERBS OF TIME

« *Never* » is placed whenever it can have the most effect :

A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes *never* itself
= yet never tastes IV-830

Rival's foot had spurned *never* that House to earth else
.V-877

Place of négative :

After the *Présent Participle* :

And mistaking *not* II-624

III. ARTICLE

Indefinite :

1) In appositions Browning sometimes suppresses the indefinite article e.g.

Adelaide, recluse no longer I-995

= a recluse no longer

True bard II-497

= He was *a* true bard

So opportune effect = *an* effet IV-400

At price of past gain, bar of fresh increase IV-649

= (which was) *a* bar

They lose themselves in that, means to an end V-444

= they that are *a* means

2) Sometimes he suppresses it after *such* :

Why such performance should exact applause II-140

= such *a* performance

IV. NOUNS

He changes Infinitives into Nouns :

The To-Come VI-296

The To-Be = The Future

He forms nouns with negative accompanying numeral adjectives followed by nouns :

No-one time (VI-187), cf. II Some no-time

Personal

Very often the Personal Pronoun is used before the subject is known :

He — Azzo IV-540

In the same manner as the verb is used before the subject is known :

Hurried down Boniface IV-486

V. VERB :

Browning, by a suppression of prepositions, changes intransitive verbs into transitive :

Sank (down) V-889

Blot (out) V-158

Point (out) V-123

VI. PREPOSITIONS :

In is wrongly used for *into*

Thrusting *in* time eternity's concern I 566

INVERSIONS

Inversions are frequently found in the English language, but in Browning they are particularly numerous, for, not content with making a very liberal use of those already existing, he employs not a few of his own invention.

- a) The simplest form of the inversion consists in placing the subject *after* the verb. This, Browning makes use

of, to call attention to the subject :

Appears Verona I 10

- b) An Auxiliary verb with a personal pronoun gives us the interrogative form :

Can I foil ? I 848

- c) But Browning also makes use of this form with ordinary verbs : *instead of using the auxiliary verb Do* e.g.

See you ? I 235 = Do you see ?

Turns he ? I 813 = Does he turn ?

Failed Adelaide see V 58 = Did Adelaide fail to see?

- d) 1. A supposition can be expressed by « *if* » followed by words placed in the logical order or by the suppression of « *if* » with an inversion. Browning employs both forms, but more frequently the second :

e.g.

Wert thou to hear : I-71 = if thou wert to hear !

Sometimes he employs both forms, *side by side* :

If holds our Friedrich's purpose, if this chain enfolds IV-754, 756.

With the verb *have* « *if* » is more generally suppressed:

Had he embraced V-846

- 2) Browning also suppresses « *if* » in the *imperative* form or in the *subjunctive*

e.g.

Be the lance upreared, the buckler wielded VI-134

= If the lance be, (supposing, etc.)

- e) An inversion is found

Also after *what if* :

e.g.

What if there remained a cause ? IV-950

- f) In direct speech, verbs, implying that the speaker's own words are given, precede their pronoun, or subject : e.g.

cried he

Quoth Naddo II-192

Quoth he II-786 and 926

- g) But Browning extends this faculty to verbs that have either the same, or about the same, quotation sense : e.g.

Urged Naddo

Judged Naddo II-185 (cf. said Naddo I-167) Naddo tells) (consequently Browning varies)

Thought Sordello II-513

Further examples

- a) And raves the winterstorm II. 455 — cf. Byron « and shrieks the seamew »
Replied the world II-621. Asked Taurello II.1004
Slunk all that was Ecelin III-517
- b) Could these undo the trance ? I-691
- d) Were it but one step VI-229
- e) Sometimes the regular order is found after « *what* »
if e.g.
What if he stalks the Trentine pass ? I-816
- f) Said the remaining women II-994
Announced a poursuivant IV-38
- g) Hasarded Naddo II-784
Urged me Taurello III-497
Closed he V-506
Remarked they V-788

- h) An inversion is at times used for the sake of liveliness:
 Talked group with restless group I-85
 Started the meagre Tuscan up 1-755
- h) Gaspèd he III-284
 Howled some old Ghibellin IV-13
 Hurries down Boniface IV-6888 (Peculiar)
- i) Similarly a sentence affects the interrogative form only to give more variety to the style, e.g. :
 Could these undo the trance ? I-691
 = These were unable to undo.
 Is it distrust ? I-975 = It is not on account of distrust
 Was the tale not of Apollo ? II-75 = The tale was... etc.
 Have they fancies ? II-165 = No doubt, they yoo have fancies.
- j) An inversion is used after *Who ? Which ? What ?*
 - *Why ? Where ?*
 Who did true service ? IV-795 (Here Browning follows the current use)
- j) These forms being regular, it will suffice to notice that Browning often suppresses the *auxiliary verb* after *why* e.g. :
 Why fled I ? III-187
 Why complained I ? III-188
- k) Inversions are likewise found after *wherefore ?* Therefore, Thereby : e.g. (Though the logical order is more often the current use).
 Wherefore have I moulded III-394
 cf. Shakespeare : « Thereby hangs a tale »
- l) At times what appears to be an interrogative form is not such in reality, but only an inversion with the

word understood that generally accompanies it : e.g.

Was for him I-610 = (There) was for him

Has he ceased II-78 = *Scarcely* has he ceased

- m) After initial Adjective, or Past Participle or some adverbs with which the inversion is not always used

Prone is the purple pavis I-115

Wounded lies in her locks Retrude V-756

Peeringly on him brooded the women-faces II-115

Wide opened the great morasses II-21

More imbecile (was) the other II-135

Dead though he might look II-285

Dumb sat she III-360

- n) 1. a) After Adverbs : Hence, Then, Thence, Whence, Whereat

- n) Whence were it once overpast IV-455

Soon was he muttering II-973

Hence must truth be casual truth VI-185

Then cast inferior idols off their borrowed crown I-499

Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire IV-433

Whereat arose a general growl I-182

Whereat so much enlarged neighbours IV-175

- b) Or after adverbial forms at beginning of Sentence :

Calmly then glided his youth away I-606

Far and wide might he disport I-615

2. Sometimes in these cases an inversion is used, and sometimes not, according to the amount of emphasis implied :

Painfully it tacks II-587

Scarcely had he... II-854, cf. II-78 (« *scarcely* » understood)

Then came the world's revenge II-617
 That April morn was it time III-350
 Thus went he on III-478
 A tiptoe looked Montelungo IV-35
 In the centre spreads a laver IV-127
 One after another were they come and gone IV-379
 Now sat the chief IV-398
 Fifty years the province held Taurello IV-810
 Browning even uses the inversion after *towards* e.g.
 Towards some such design have I worked V-856

o) 3. After : *Never, nor*

Never had this expedient served I-13

Nor laughed their host I-186

o) 4. Browning uses the inversion after *never*, but sometimes also does not, though this last case is rare :

After « *Never* »

Never has this expedient I-13

p) After *Direct* or *Indirect* object at beginning of sentences

Thus much craved his soul I-734

p) The hill-cat, his hunger blunts (blunts his hunger) I-125

For him was Naddo's notion right II-196

To *their* interest refer the deeds (that) he dwelt on
 (emphasis on the deeds refer to etc... IV-904

For such a future was endured the past

(=the past was endured) IV-1027

Much hold on you that fool obtained ! VI-259

No blame at least the brothers had incurred VI-649

For him was Naddo's notion right II-196

Never again Sordello could (N.B. *never* without inversion) II-366

Never was dunce sufficient II-625

Never could I get a glimpse III-158

Browning is particularly fond of the inversion after

« *Nor* »

Nor rest they here I-186

Nor ask (=and not to ask) I-514

He loves not nor possesses one Idea (II-395)

Nor should strength an outlet seek II-447

Nor should wisdom change II-449

Nor, moon, is it Apollo now III-50

Nor faltered voice III-399

Nor was treason here or there III-411

N. B. — In the regular interrogative form Browning makes a use of don't for does not, which is irregular :

Don't a song come ? II-943

q) After How :

How should this deject these, soul ? I-536

How (=How far) excels my life I-969

At conjecture how might words appear II-735

How should externals satisfy my soul ? II-782

How affects it her ? III-100

How dared I let III-319

But how could Salinguerra so forget ? III-518

How will he compress ? III-645

How (can we) change the world's face ? IV-626

How call you such ? IV-826

How could he doubt ? IV-1012

How coalesce the Small and Great ? V-189

How may half evade ? V-252

How have you advanced ? V-621

How little must that service prove ? VI-161

Sorrow how avoid ? VI-497

r) After initial Preposition :

At Siena is Guidone set I-577

Up and down runs arrowy fire I-500

Out there curled I-596

Again moved the arrested magic II-105

Aloof flittered some azure damsel-fly I-909

Back fell the simpler phantoms I-858

Forth glided the entire out-world I-749 et 757

Beneath a flowering thicket lay Sordello II-299

Into, whose streamlet dipped he foot I-904

On Palma passed II-33

Out burst one face III-352

Round each new discovery wreathed fancies I-639

Up he struck II-71

Sometimes the logical order is kept, e.g. :

Before him the country stretched II-304

Was for him no other world (only apparent inversion (1) there was no *inversich* I-610

Up in the mist a truth grew (no inversion) III-742

Forth they stood (no inversion) VI-155

s) Inversions after « *so* » and « *such* » with their different meanings :

So (=thus) jogged they on I-185

So kindly blazed it I-227

And so (thus) reclines he I-336

So fare they (cf. So they found at Babylon I-592) I-505

Where no inversion is used.

(1) It is not necessary to speak of inversions after *there* in impersonal forms save when *there* is suppressed as here.

N.B. — When « So » is separated by a comma or followed by *that* the inversion is not always used :
So, homage (that) other souls direct without, turns inward I-537

So flung (so)-swung our architect I-667/8

So (=even) might Apollo II-614

So hampered him the Man-part (to such a degree) II-687

So, forward in a trice were shows to greet him II-924

So (=to such a degree) dark were the embers III-74

And so the night flew on (here, no inversion cf. I-537)

So shall you take it III-495

So (=to such a degree) occupied then are we III-862

(cf. « So close the hazels meet » — no inversion) III-875

Suffer such a change that in Romano sought he IV-556

So was I (=also) V-506

t) After Why ; While

Why needs Sordello square his course ? II-378

While there fleets a pageant III-209

Why branch the disciples arms ? III-1008

Why (should he) affect that heartless tone to Tito ?
IV-906

Why (was there) that rage ? V-770

u) Certain inversions are the result of the verse itself.
e.g.

Forced the earth his couch to make = forced to make
of the earth his couch. (I-129)

Some with meek arms behind their back disposed =
Some with meek arms disposed behind their back I-418

Glanced some missive o'er = o'er some missive I-288

Whose brow the dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er
I-329

And still more labyrinthine buds the rose I-476
Round the rest is furled... a veil I-478
On each full fraught discovery brooding I-483
While at Siena is Guidone set I-576
How hot the pulses throb its heart below I-734

v) After *Whose* :

Whose clansman was ever Salinguerra V-927

w) Sometimes Browning uses an inversion after *Whether*;
But whether bids she slake my thirst VI-376

x) Also in exclamatory sentences :

Why there sat Palma ! III-358

« 'Twas taken, Palma's bent III-358

« 'twas slipped, the occasion II-738

y) And after *'twas*

'twas fled all pain V-784

z) An inversion is also used when the direct object begins the sentence e.g.

Thus much craved his soul I-734

GENERAL SUMMING-UP OF PARAGRAPHS ON INVERSIONS

Thus we see that Browning's use of inversions — though varied — conforms itself to the regular usage, except in a few cases.

These inversions invariably give a sprightliness and vigour to the sentences in which they are employed. Those of Shakespeare are often quite as bold as his, and Milton's are more Latin than English. Tennyson's — though fairly free — are the nearest to the genius of the language.

b) Punctuation

As will be seen from the Appendix 1) many of Browning's critics reproached him with his bad punctuation. No doubt that this was very faulty in the first edition, mainly because Browning fancied that most people in his time paid little attention to punctuation (1).

But in his later edition he was very careful to revise it thoroughly, and, at present, there are hardly any reproaches that can be made him in this respect.

SPELLING

« *Sordello* » being virtually the story of an Italian poet, Browning is careful to keep, whenever it is possible, the Italian form of names, whether Historical or Geographical: e g :

- a) *Azzo, Bassano, Cino Bocchimpane, Buccio, Este, Godego, Linguetta, Loria, Marostica, Rovigo, Salinguerra, Virtu, etc.*

However when they have become Anglicized he does not scruple to use them : *Boniface, Ecelin* (for *Ezzelino*). A very few are spelt differently :

Gesi for Jesi, Vimmercato for Vicomercato.

- b) He adopts archaic forms such as :

Burthen for Burden, v. 218 Crampt 1. 542 for cramped, (see however cramped (IV. 118) ; prest (1927) for pressed ; Mixt (1.364) for mixed. Stamp 1.543) for stamped.

(1) Notice for instance W. Scott's letters and those of many of his contemporaries where both spelling and punctuation were alike very uncertain.

Sung for sang 11.132 (cf. 11.256) sprung for sprang,
Accompt for account, *Amaze* for Amazement, *Ging-*
lingly for Jinglingly, *Restiff* for Restive.

He curtails verbs also, as does Shakespeare :

'scape = escape ; plaining (VI 23) = complaining ;
reft = bereft (IV. 946), tangled = entangled, (V. 422).

c) Parentheses - Dashes - Brackets

PARENTHESES

Parentheses are mainly used by Browning to give vent to his personal feelings, to explain to his reader what he thinks of the actions of the puppets whose strings he pulls.

Sometimes his remarks take up several lines, at other moments, they cut asunder a sentence, breaking into the middle of a demonstration, regardless of the reader, who finds himself helplessly seeking the tail-end of a sentence, that at least wriggles in, where it best can.

It is to be noticed first of all that there are two kinds of Parentheses in « *Sordello* ». Those enclosed between *brackets*, and those that are not. In this respect Browning is not careful to distinguish. By some *overlooking* on his part, he, at times, encloses a word *inside* brackets, and, at others, *does not do so*. For instance, the single word « conceive » which, (in line 216, Book I), is enclosed, and elsewhere is not (cf. I 657).

Browning's parentheses are mainly intended by him to help the reader to understand the story, but they are also made use of by him to give vent to his irony, sarcasm, or banter, thus, in Book Two, (line 416-424), he chides

Sordello severely for the lengthy explanations he (in reality Browning himself), has been giving as to his intentions:

*(Dear Monarch, I beseech
Notice how lamentably wide a breach
Is here : discovering this discover too
What our poor world has possibly to do
With it ! As pigmy natures as you please,
So much the better for you ! take your ease
Look on and laugh, style yourself God alone (1)
Strangle some day, with a cross olive-stone
All that is right enough, but, why want us
To know that you yourself know thus and thus ?)*

Another similar example is to be found in Book V. (Verse 666-667), but though the two lines break in, right in the middle of the tale, there are no brackets !

My poor Sordello, what may we extort
By this I wonder ?

Brackets, however, are always indispensable in such a case.

At other times the parenthesis serves to explain some detail that Browning fancies the reader may ignore :

*Only distinct in priests for castellans
Had Popes for Suzerains (Their rule confessed
Its rule, their interest its interest
Living for sake of living ; there an end
Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend
In making adversaries or allies)*

(« Sordello » V-Verse 143-150)

(1) Allusion to verse 160 of the same Book :
« needs must be a God to such ».

Here, in fact it may be necessary for him to show, *en passant*, that, at the time of which he is speaking, i.e. the Middle Ages, *Royalty* governed by sheer force alone, whilst the *Clergy* sought to rule by moral force without having recourse to diplomacy. But it must be admitted that on other occasions he leaves us without any explanation, when we are sorely in need of one !

Again, the parenthesis is most inconvenient at times when it cuts in, before a sentence is ended, and so, separating the first half from the last, renders the interpretation of the sense more difficult, e.g.

*Let slip no opportunities
As pitiful, forsooth, beside the prize
To drop on him some no-time and acquit
His constant faith The poet-half to Wit,
That, waiving any compromise between
No joy and all joy, kept the hunger keen
Beyond most methods of incurring scoff
From the Man-portion* (II-662-688)

However, Browning very often does not realize how abrupt his transitions of thought are, as in the passage we have already quoted from Book V (Verse 293-299).

Again in Book V, verse 590, Browning addresses Sordello but does not use brackets : « *Ah ! my Sordello,* » etc...

This brings us to another peculiarity of Browning's which has sometimes the same effect. i.e. his *Dashes*.

DASHES

Browning's dashes — over 500 in the six books of « *Sordello* » — reveal his analytical turn of mind. His

thought, invariably rapid, pauses at times for a second, as though perceiving some other side of the question in hand which modifies the aspect of the main drift. Hardly has it proceeded on its way again, before the subtle web the author is weaving appears to him as capable of a fresh modification that will bring out its essential features, so, as he proceeds, he brings in, once more, some modifying clause, some new thread to heighten or attenuate the general pattern he has in view.

« The Dash », says a Grammarian (1), is frequently employed in a very capricious and arbitrary manner, as a substitute for all sorts of points, by writers whose thoughts — although they may be sometimes striking and profound — are altogether without order or dependence ; also by some others who think that they thereby give prominence and emphasis to expressions which in themselves are very commonplace, and would — without this fictitious assistance — escape the observation of the reader, or be deemed by him hardly worthy of notice ».

This criticism can hardly be applied to Browning. However, it is true that his use of the Dash is far too frequent, and sometimes entirely capricious, but seeing the rapidity of his transitions, it is at least useful in serving to warn us, as it does, that he is passing from one idea to another e.g. :

« Never — I should warn you first — Of my own Choice etc.

(I.II)

(1) Beadnell : Spelling and Punctuation. (Wyman's Technical Series, Menken) Quoted in *The King's English* by H. W. Fowler Oxford Clarendon Press 1906.

COMBINATION OF BRACKETS, DASHES,
AND ELLIPSES

It is when Browning combines Brackets with Dashes and Ellipses that the sense of his sentences becomes most difficult to extricate.

We have chosen the passage which appears to us as the most typical in all the poem, for it is one of the rarest of its kind, the one, in which Browning explains to what point he has brought his hero in his Third Book.

He wishes to make clear that *one* period of his life was quite accomplished. Experience had taught him that it was, first of all, impossible for him through « Wisdom » or « Strength » or « Grace » to make Mankind recognize his superiority over them, since he was ugly and weak. Next he could not, with the help of Song alone convince them of his Genius, and, again, he was no less willing to remain content with the mere consciousness of his own true value. He therefore hits at last upon the idea of using Mankind as a *means* to act out what he conceives and thereby disclosing his essential greatness. In a word if he strives to get into contact with Humanity it is, as yet, only with a purely egoistical motive. Having thus explained the main idea let us examine the passage itself :

For thus

I bring Sordello to the rapturous
Exclaim at the crowd's cry, because one round
Of life was quite accomplished ; and he found
Not only that a soul what' er its might,
Is insufficient to its own delight,
Both in corporal organs and in skill

By means of such to body forth its Will —
 And, after, insufficient to apprise
 Men of that Will, oblige them recognise
 The Hid by the Revealed — but that, — the last
 Nor lightest of the struggles overpast, —
 Will, he bade abdicate, which would not void
 The throne, might sit there, suffer he enjoyed
 Mankind, a varied and divine array
 Incapable of homage, the first way,
 Nor fit to render incidentally
 Tribute connived at, taken by the by,
 In joys. If thus with warrant to rescind
 The ignominious exile of mankind —
 Whose proper service, ascertained intact
 As yet, (to be by him themselves made act,
 Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
 Was to secure — if the true diadem
 Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
 The wisdom of that golden Palma, — thank
 Verona's Lady in her citadel
 Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell, etc.

(III-561)

« *A soul what'er its might* » this is a shortened form
 for : whatever its greatness may have been.

« *Is insufficient* » = it cannot disclose itself with the
 help of *bodily skill* « *And after, insufficient* ». Next, it
 cannot reveal its hidden power. « *But that last* » — when
 he gave up striving to do what was impossible, i.e. to
 convince them ; « *Will he bade abdicate* », he made a
 concession : renounced reigning over them ostensibly (cf.

Book II verse 365) but his real worth refused to quit the throne where it sate. (Monarch of Mankind II-354) Mankind that was grouped round it, but paid it no homage, though Sordello had at first expected much. « *Nor fit* » etc.: incapable of so doing, though Sordello hankered very much after it, to such a degree that he accepted casual consolations. Now comes the second half of the paragraph. « *If* » is repeated, as we are to be thankful for *two* things = first if the « ignominious » abstention of Mankind ceased, their duty being that he should make them act, and not that they should look on, while *he* acted, if *the* true crown of life seemed about to crown him while he drank in Palma's golden speech. *The Lady of Verona's citadel was to be thanked.*

Unfortunately for Browning's casual reader, the dashes and the brackets only serve to confuse the meaning, since both of them interrupt the normal course of the sentence while the peculiar use of the « *was to secure* » with the hidden passive sense, as well as the various complications entailed by the cumbersome subordinate clauses, all combine to render the whole passage infinitely more difficult to understand than if Browning had split his ideas into shorter and simpler forms.

But, we again repeat, if such passages are to be condemned let us not forget that they are extremely rare, while we admit that, by itself, it is assuredly capable of deterring a host of readers from continuing to read « *Sordello* ».

Another shorter, but similar passage quoted that already from Book II ; — (verse 662-668) :

Let slip no opportunities
As pitiful, forsooth, beside the prize
To drop on him some no-time and acquit
His constant faith (The Poet half's to wit —
That waiving any compromise between
No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
Beyond most methods) — of incurring\ scoff
From the Man-portion.....

Here, as in the longer example given above, we have four lines separating « *acquit* » from « of incurring scoff » while the « Poet half's to wit » is separated from « Kept », by a parenthesis.

In other passages where the words are so jumbled together that we can only with difficulty determine their proper place, we are forced to admit that in all probability the author was hampered by the verse-form. Yet he was so skilful an adept in this respect, that we may hesitate to ascribe it to this reason : e.g. :

« Mantuans... the main of them admiring still
How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
His fingers ends » (II 627-631).

Here, the construction « *Had Montfort at completely* » can in no case be admitted.

We now give one last passage which, with the other two cited, constitute the three most peculiar in the poem.

« The last voice murmurs, 'twixt the blossomed vines
Of Men, of that Machine supplied by thought,
To compass self-perception with, he sought

By forcing half himself, — an insane pulse
Of a God's blood, on clay it could convulse,
Never transmute, — on human sight and sounds,
To watch the other half with » etc... (III 23-30).

Here the necessary brackets, on the contrary, are missing, after « sought », just as the *but* is lacking before « never », which would have made the meaning easier to grasp, whilst it is the very absence of a dash, that is wanting before « on » as well as « *which* » before *he*. which Browning, alas, elsewhere so profusely throws into the midst of his sentences.

We can now pass on to a subject, closely allied to the one we have just examined, that is to say the process by which Browning transforms the sentences themselves into a kind of Bracket holding another sentence or other sentences. We mean the insertion of sentences inside other sentences.

INSERTIONS OF SENTENCES

a) Sometimes two or three words only are inserted, but most awkwardly : Took off his iron arms from, (one by one) Sordello's shrinking shoulders (V-885) Compare Had Montfort at completely so to speak His finger's ends (II-361).

b) At other times the insertion consists only of one line:

« *Ay, watch that latest dream of thine —*
— *A Rome Indebted to no Palatine —*
Drop arch by Arch (V-5, 6)

Example of insertion :

of *two* lines :

There should be laws

(Remember how my youth escaped. I trust

To you for manhood, Palma ! Tell me just

As any child) there must be laws at work (IV-897-900)

Here, at least, Browning begins his sentence over again, rendering the sense easier to seize.

Of *three* lines :

So he turned,

Enough amused by fancies fairly earned

of Este's horror-struck submitted neck :

And Richard, the coward braggart, at his beck

To his own petty and immediate doubt, (IV-856-860)

= turned to

We come finally to an example of a double insertion :

How they used —

Whenever their superior introduced

A novice to the Brotherhood — (for I

Was just a Brown-Sleeve Brother, merrily,

Appointed too- quoth he, « till Innocent

Bade me relinquish, to my small content,

My wife and my brown sleeves ») some brother spoke

Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke

The edict issued, etc. (5 lines follow !) (IV-962-974)

(See also IV. 976-909 and IV-996-999)

This however is exceedingly rare : but here the sense is easier to find, there being no ellipses.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

A) Vocabulary

The two main divisions of « *Sordello* » according to Browning himself being *Historical* and *Philosophical*, he had first of all to make use of Geographical and Historical Terms :

Now Browning, who possessed a profound knowledge of Italy and Italian history has introduced into « *Sordello* » Geographical and Historical terms and allusions pertaining to the period of the Middle Ages during which his hero lived.

Thus we meet with the following :

I - Geographical Terms :

a) Names of Towns and Places :

In Italy, France, Germany.

Ancona I 297 *Apulia* I 988

Asolan and *Euganean Hills* I 259 ; *Asolo* VI 854

Bassano, *Brienne* I, 195 *Egna* VI 666 *Ferrara* I 106

Florence I 573 *Goito* I 281 *The Isle* I 979

Lombardy I 202 *Mantua* I 374 *Messina* I 981

Milan I 260 *Nocera* III 120 *Oliero* I 138 *Padua* I 149

Provence I 984 *Rome* I 293 *The Rhetian and The Julian Hills* I 260 *Roncaglia* I 257 *Sicily, Siena* I 576
Trentine Pass I 816 *Tyrol (Vale of) Trent* I 256
Trevisan I 248 *Vicenza* II 320 *Vimmercato* V 197.

Rivers :

Bacchiglione, Brenta, Mincio, Po.

Valleys :

Ru, San Zeno.

b) *Names of Palaces, Churches : Gates.*

San Biagio IV 727 (Church)

St Blaise III 422 (Gate)

St. Eufemia I 579 (Church)

San Pietro (Palace)

St. Francis (Church)

However, at times, Browning makes allusions to celebrated places or persons of other countries and thereby reveals his erratic vein (1)

Africa : Found 'twas Apis' flank II 92

Mauritanian V 57

Mareotic juice V 66

The horned and snouted *Lybian* God V 645

Thebes or Rome V 647

Asia : The Armenian bridegroom I 344

They found at *Babylon* I 593

Mummy's grasp III 217

Tyrrhene III 13.

Belgium : Aix V 185

Byzantine

(1) We must not forget the intercourse of various nations in the Middle Ages, especially during the Crusades.

Empire : Superb as *Byzant* domes III 130

Charlemagne III 635 cf. V 132

Athens or *Byzant* V 643.

Europe : Gaul : Brennus III 588.

France : Provence I 985

Montfort (Simon de) II 617

Claremont V 193

Hugh of Provence IV 992.

Grècece : Loxian I 603

Pythons I 928.

His Delians I 933 II 488

Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love II 211

Gesi V 834

Apollo I 898 et 927

Trireme III 13

Pollux III 554

Tempe III 900

Painted King, Polycrates III 962

Lydian King (Croesus) V 82

Typhon V 502

Two eagles of Zeus VI 84

Hesperian Fruit VI 84

Rome :

To start up Brutus VI 455

Palatine V 6

The *Sabine* dart II 178

Massic Jars II 300

Baiae II 301

Jove IV 603

Caecuban V 66.

Sicily : The thunder phrase of the Athenian (Aeschylus)
I 65 cf. III 940.

Spain :

The Caliph's wheelwork man (Haroun Al Raschid)
V 447

Switzerland :

The Mountaineers : Albigenses, II 617

Venice :

The spoils of every clime at Venice V 644

Theodore and Mark VI 749 (Pillars in The Square of
St Mark's).

II - Historical

Browning is particularly careful about the spelling of foreign words : In « Sordello » he keeps as closely as possible to the French and the Italian forms. Thus we find Adelaide, Barbarossa, Buccio Virtu, Cino Bocchimpane, Constance, Cunizza, Dandolo, Elcorte, Nina, Podesta, Retrude, Richard, Sordello (and not Sordel), Taurello, Tito, Tiso Sampieri, Vicenza, Vidal, except when the words has become too familiar to the English ear to be discarded, such, as Alberic, Alexander, Henry, Innocent, John o'Brienne.

Adelaide : Wife of Ecelin.

Adelardi : Famous family.

Agiluph : Husband of Theodelinda and King of Lombardy
590 A.D.

Agnes of Este : Wife of Ecelin.

Alcamo : Poet of Palermo (1112-1178).

Alexander : Pope Alexander II. V 186.

Anafest ; Lucio : imaginary personages (cf. Bianca, idem).

- Apollo's Shrine* : temple of Apollo at Seleucia.
- Arabs' wisdom* : Letters in Arabic. I 397.
- Armenian bridegroom* : a custom still observed at a wedding. I 344.
- Arpo or Yoland* : Adventurer who founded the house of Romano. I 245.
- Athenian* : Æschylus. I 65.
- Atraversi* : Notable family at Vicence.
- Auria* : A wife of Ecclin the Stammerer.
- Azzo of Este* : see Browning's « Sordello » Verse 292-298, also 166-187. Book I.
- Babylon* : The legend of, see Ammianus Marcellinus.
- Barbarossa* : Frederick 1st, Emperor crowned in 1152, died 1190.
- Basilic* : St. Mark's at Venice. III 765
- Bassanese* : inhabitants of Bassano.
- Bianchi e Neri* : The rival factions : Blacks and Whites.
- Bigboned Alberic* : Second son of Ecclin the Monk.
- Blacks and Whites* : Bianchi e Neri — Ghibellins and Guelfs.
- Bocafoli* : imaginary poet II 768.
- Brennus* : Gaulish general.
- Brutus* : Lucius Brutus. VI 455.
- Buccio Virtu* : I 147 belongs to the Guelf party.
- Bulb dormant* : It was an Egyptian custom to bury hyacinths in tombs III 280.
- Buried Vestal* : Virgin consecrated to Vesta, condemned to be buried alive if found unchaste.
- Byzant* : III. 130 old name for Constantinople.
- Byzant-rifled* : V. 648 cf. III. 130.
- Caliph's wheel-work-man* : V. 447 automaton said to be invented by Haroun Al Raschid.

- Carroch* : I, 318 war-carriage.
- Caryatides* : from Carys, a town in Arcadia.
- Castellans* : governors of castles, V 144.
- Centaur* : refers to the constellation.
- Cesano* : see Dante : Inferno 27-47.
- Charlemagne* : First of the Holy Roman Emperors.
- Cino Bocchimpanè* : I 146. a citizen belonging to one of the two parties of Guelfs and Ghibellins, the typical partisan of the Ghibellins.
- Concorezzi* : a noble family of Padua.
- Conrad* : *Conrad the Third* : first of the Hohenstauffens, his follower was Godego.
- Court of Love* : Poetical Tournament. (II 66).
- Crescentius* : (Nomentanus) a patriot leader who, as consul about 980, revived the Republic of Rome. IV 960.
- Cunizza* : sister of Palma. V 955.
- Cydippe* : VI. 140 cf. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
- Dandolo* : III. 132 the blind Doge, led the 4th Crusade.
- Daphne* : Nymph loved by Apollo (I. 939).
- Delians* : Priestesses of Apollo. I. 933. II. 488.
- Devil, Ecelin The* : Eldest son of Ecelin VI, The Monk. cf. Dante Inferno XII-110.
- Duke of the Rood* : Azzo, head of the Lombard League and Knight of the Holy Cross.
- Dularète* : (VI. 181) Another name for Count Carlo Dottori.
- Ecelin* : Called « *the Monk* », head of the Ghibellin party, son of Ecelin the Stammerer, father, by Adelaide the Tuscan, of Ecelin III and Alberic, between whom he divided his lands in 1223.

- Ecclō* : Founder of the House of Romano.
- Elcorte* : (II. 331) IV 740. V 311. a poor Knight from Mantua, father of Sordello.
- Elys* : an ideal woman. (II 68).
- Father Porphyry* : an imaginary Abbot. I. 307.
- Fasces* : rods tied with an axe in the middle, a sign of authority.
- Flawless Ruby* : See Legend of Polycrates. III. 962.
- Florentine* : Dante. I, 349, 367. VI, 834.
- Friedrich II* : Grandson of Barbarossa Emperor of Germany ; Pope Honorius crowned him at Rome in 1220. I. 78, 207.
- Gesi* : (Jesi) town in the province of Ancona. Frederick II was born there.
- Ghibellins* : Partisans of Friedrich.
- Giudecca* : Venetian Canal. III. 693.
- Guelfs* : Partisans of the Church.
- Guidone* : Guido da Sienna. Painter of the 12 th century.
- Guido the Bolognian* : a painter of the 12 th century.
- Hesperian fruit* : apples of the garden of the Hesperides.
- Hercules* : III, 939. V, 568. Busiris seized Hercules and tried to slay him but was slain. See Herodotus.
- Hildebrand* : I. 309. V, 161, 216. Later made Pope under the name of Gregory VII who aimed at secular as well as spiritual dominion of the Church.
- Honorius* III. Pope, 1216.
- Hyacinth* : II. 615 see Ovid's « Metamorphoses ». 10.
- Ibis' tail* : Egyptian symbol. (II. 965).
- Island-house* : III. 119 Emperor's villa near Palermo (Sicily) called La Favara.
- Innocent III* : Pope 1198. V, 186.

- John of Brienne* : I. 194. King of Jerusalem.
- John's cloud-girt-angel* : Revelation X — 1. 2. 8. 10.
- John's Vision* : see Book of Revelation.
- Jongleurs* : Jugglers, gleemen. II, 120.
- Jove trined* : who shows himself auspicious. IV, 603.
- Jupiter, Saturn* : Here, the Roman deities. V, 554.
- King-bird* : the Egyptian Phenix. VI, 583.
- King Otho* : Otho III. I. 108, 275 ; II. 912 ; IV. 584 ; V. 183.
- Lybian God* : Seth, principle of evil. V, 645.
- Lombard League* : League formed by fifteen cities : Milan, Bologna, Piacenza, Verona, Brescia, Faenza, Mantua, Vercelli, Lodi, Bergamo, Turin, Alessandria, Vicenza, Padua, Trevisa, — against the German Emperor. I. 110.
- Lord, Liegeman, Vavassor, Suzerain* : I. 769. different feudal grades.
- Lori* : imaginary gallant I. 859.
- Lydian King* : Cræsus, King of Lydia. V, 82.
- Mad Lucius and sage Antonine* : Lucius Verus, Roman general, sacked Seleucia 163. A.D. ; Marc Aurelius Antonius, philosopher. I. 594.
- Mainard* : a Tyrolese Lord. (IV. 43-322).
- Malek* : name of any Moor. I. 842.
- Maltraversi* : II. 323, 324. Famous Family.
- Mantua Albert* : Patriarch of Jerusalem. V, 201.
- Mareotie Juice* : Wine from Lake Maerotis in Egypt. V, 66.
- Massic Jars* : Massic or Falernian wine in jars.
- Marostiea* : Hamlet in the Alps.
- Matilda* : Countess of Tuscany. III, 492.
- Meribah* : Numbers XX. 13. III. 820.
- Miramoline* : Prince of the Faithful. *Saraden* Prince I. 869.

- Montelungo* : IV. 33 m 285 ; VI. 224. Delegate from Gregory IX.
- Montfort* : who led the crusade of the Church against the Albigenses. II, 617.
- Mooned-sandal* : V, 15 crescent-toed shoe of nobleman in the Middle-Ages.
- Naddo* : poet representing the ordinary mind. I, 694, 748 ; II, 10, 67.
- Nicolo of Pisa* : sculptor and architect, -- one of the pioneers of early Italian art. I. 576.
- Nina* : an Italian Sappho, wrote in Sicilian. V, III.
- Oliero* : Monastery near Bassano. I, 140.
- Old Azzo* : father of Azzo VII, IV, 632.
- Old Boniface* : father of Richard Boniface. IV, 632.
- Old Redbeard* : Barbarossa. IV, 83.
- Otho* : Otho IV. I, 198, 275.
- Otho* : the Third. V, 183.
- Palatine* : a dweller in a palace. V, 6.
- Pandects* : Code of Justinian. IV, 1012.
- Papal Key* : the insignia of Rome.
- Pappacoda* : a jongleur. II, 825.
- Pauldron* : plate-armour to protect the shoulder. V. 723, 874.
- Paulician* : II. 865. See « Rough Peasant ».
- Pavis* : from the Italian pavese, a shield. I. 116.
- Pentapolin* : king of the Garamanteans (Don Quixote I. 3) I. 6.
- Perseus* : who saved Andromeda. II. 214.
- Philip* : Emperor contesting Otho's claim. IV. 579.
- Pilio and Bernardo* : probably imaginary personages. IV, 726.

Piombi : Ducal palace at Venice. III, 876.

Pisano : Painter 1206-1278.

Pistore : Bishop, II. 336.

Plara : imaginary poet. III, 882.

Pollux : son of Zeus. III, 554.

Pope John : John XV th.

Potiphar's mishap : Genesis. 39. III. 823.

Potsherd him : Joshua IX-X.

Prata : II. 335. Pythonons I. 929.

Pythonesse : a priestess of Apollo. V, 81.

Pyx : sacred coffer. I, 591.

Retrude : daughter of the Emperor Henry VI and wife of Salinguerra. In Browning, Sordello's mother. II, 910. IV, 788, 755. V.

Richard of St Boniface : Lombard noble of Montferrat. I, 103, 167, 175.

Ramon : Hamlet on the hills of the Alps.

Roman bride : a wedding-custom among the Romans. II, 178.

Rough peasant Paul : untutored people who interpret the Scripture after their own idea. II, 860.

Rule of Charlemagne : (broken), Hildebrand would have made the Roman Empire, subservient to the Church.

Saint-Eufemia : Church at Verona. I, 579.

Saint-Francis of Assisi : founder of the Franciscan order. V. 202.

Samminiato : hill commanding Florence. V, 859.

Saponi : founders of the Ecelin family. III, 460.

Sardius : Cornelian stone. III, 136.

Satrap : Persian governor of a province. III. 14.

Scarab'neath the tongue : a knot under the tongue in the

shape of a beetle, a mark distinguishing a sacred bull.
II, 91.

Sirvent : poem of praise or service. II, 516.

Sofia's Egna : Sofia, daughter of Ecelin, married Henry of Egna. VI, 660.

Soldan : Sultan. II, 970.

Sophia : Last wife of Salinguerra.

Sordello Prince Visconti : Aliprando, the poet, makes Sordello a member of the Visconti Family.

Squarcialupe and Tagliafer : (cf. 783). Jongleurs. II, 118.

Strojavacca : imaginary troubadour. II, 936.

Suzerains : feudal over-lords. IV.

Sidney : Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) « *Starry* » reference to « *Stella* » and « *Astrophel* ». I, 69.

Taurello : See Browning's « *Sordello* » : Book I. 160. B. I. 240. of a noble family of Ferrara. see « *Sordello* » Book IV Verse 470-849.

Tenzon : contest in verse. II, 516, 686.

The Hermit : Peter the Hermit. IV.

The Kaiser : Frederick II. I.

The Torriani : A Lombard faction of Volcassina.

The Twenty-Four : Those who formed the Council. at Verona. I, 907.

Three Imperial Crowns : The Roman (golden), the German (silver), the Italian (iron). V, 184.

Thyrsus : a staff round which was wound ivy.

Titan : refers to Orion.

Tiso Sampier : Legate from Trent. IV, 41. VI, 223. one of Ecelin's deadliest enemies.

Triad : statues of the three patron-saints of Venice. V, 650.

Trireme : galley with three tiers of oars. III, 8.

Truchman : A follower. II, 480.

Two Eagles : VI, 606. cf. Pindar IVth Pythian Ode.

Typhon : monstrous son of Zeus. V, 502.

Tyrrhene welk : shell-fish from Tyre.

Vidal : a troubadour of Toulouse hated by Sordello. Cf. Dante.

Visconti : See « *Sordello* » Prince Visconti.

Vivaresi : became later, head of the Ghibellin party. II, 321.

Xanthus : III, 1013. Cf. *A Death in the Desert*.

III - Philosophical

The Philosophical terms in « *Sordello* » are distinguished by a capital letter (1) and are rarer in the first part of the poem than in the last. Browning has given us to understand that he was himself aware of the dangers of introducing Philosophical terms into poetry : « Now you're a bard, a bard past doubt and no philosopher. Why introduce crotchets like these ? » (Book II verse 788-790).

Book I : A simple sense of life, 627.

Perceptions strange, 630.

Fancies infantine, 639.

Thought and sense, 645.

Doubt that nurtures Judgment, 677, 678.

Moral sense, 684.

Sordello selfish, 685.

New-born Judgment, 718, 722.

Attributes, 806 cf. 718.

(1) Notice too, that among the marginal notes added by Browning in the edition of 1863, he makes great use of Capitals otherwise than for nouns.

Book II : Function, 383.

One Idea, 395.

Perception Thought, 588.

The Poet, The Man, 659.

The Poet-half, 664.

The Man portion, 665.

The Poet's Scheme, 668.

The Poet-part, 675.

Man-part, 687.

The complete Sordello, 690.

The Body, 866.

The Machine, 994.

Acting Will, Demonstrating, Reflecting Will, The
Will Itself, 998.

Book III : Will — 34 ; 175 ; 176 ; 186 ; 570.

Will and the means to show Will.

Great and Small, Material, Spiritual, 45.

With Being are endued, 160.

Distinct from what they see, 161.

Happiness, 162-171.

Use of Life, 166.

Alien ; Native, 172.

My Means, 176.

Next age, 181.

The Sight, 213.

Thoughts may be over poetical for poetry, 256.

The Revealed, 571.

Life's business, 646.

The Evil and the Good, 729.

Life's temple floor, 750.

Evil the Scheme, 804.

Complex Gin, 851.

A Man, 933.

Book IV : Supply a body to his soul, 203 (2)

Because a few of them were notable

Should all be figured worthy note ? 207

Poor Misery etc., 236.

Privilege procure for all, 236.

The Cause, 299.

Rome's the Cause, 1012.

Book V : Demiurge,, 60.

God has conceded two sights to a man, 86.

The collective man out strips the individual, 103.

The Multitude, 124.

A soul should turn a multitude, 152.

Will and Slave, 170.

Strength Knowledge, 178.

Strength, 196.

Pernicious Strength, 200.

Use of Strength, 204.

Knowledge, 211.

Knowledge part by Strength, 227.

Great Men, 427.

Knowledge, 442.

The People, 455.

I, ordained its Champion from eternity, 485.

The Multitude, 536.

Protoplast V-526, 526.

Some Calm, 552.

Chaos, 556.

Song, 560.

Thought, 576.

Life's Elemental mask, 584.

Today, Yesterday, 627.

Past, 629.

Strength with Knowledge, 669.

Book VI : Love, Hate, 89-90.

Good, 93.

The Best, 94.

Good, the Best, 107.

The People, 120.

The Crowd, 147-155.

Then, Now, 159.

Now, To come, 205.

Now Then, 214.

The People, 228.

Evil, Beauty, 237, 238.

Evil, 240.

Good, 241.

Good and Ill, 249.

Sorrow, 252.

Mankind's experience, 272.

The Whole, The Part, 284.

For Mankind's Salvation, 275.

Above, Death, 290.

Death, Life, 291.

Joy, 308, 324, 325.

Then, Now, 319-320.

Joy, grief, 328.

Virtue, Vice, 330.

Hindrances, 358.

Fate, 362, 363, 375.

Joys, 410.

Right, 446.

Ill and Will, Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness,
Virtue and Vice, The Large and the Less, 469-471.

Nucleus, VI, 463.

Eternity, Soul, Matter, Mind, 474-475.

Good, III, 478.

Time, 486.

Soul, Matter, 492.

Joy, Sorrow, 493, 497.

Small, Great, 503.

Virtue, Good, Beauty, 537.

Wrong, Right, III, Good, 546.

Eternity, Time, 552.

Great, Good, Beauteous, 554.

All Before, After, Small, 576.

A Power, 591-598.

Human, Divine, 602.

IV - Rare or Archaic terms in Browning

Archaic forms.

Besides these Historical, Geographical and Philosophical Terms, Browning makes frequent use of: **Older forms** he borrows either from Chaucer, Spenser, Bacon, Shakespeare, Milton, or of words and expressions that he found in other Romantic Poets, such as Keats, Shelley, Coleridge.

Archaic or rare terms are not very numerous in Browning considering the length of his poem, nearly 6.000 lines.

They are to be found in the greatest English writers, but mainly in Shakespeare :

ACQUIST : (III 201, VI 705).

« Extricate for my *acquist* each object »

News received of this *acquist*.

Browning uses this word twice : it is derived from the Latin *acquisitum* commonly used for the action, whilst *acquiest* is employed for the result, first found in 1613. Sir A. Sherlay Travels to Persia. « The profile which must needs follow from so great an *acquist*. The term is also found in Bacon, J. Taylor, Barrow. Browning made use of it later in *Christmas Eve* 213. and we find it in Trench's Poems.

AMORT : (VI 47)

« His sensitiveness, now *amort*, alive now »

is most likely a remembrance of Keats = Eve of St Agnes. 8.

BREESE : (II 774)

This term is explained by Browning himself — « *Gad-fly*, that is. » cf Johnson's Dictionary « a stinging insect, a Gadfly ». « Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the *breeze* ».

BLINKARD : (V 14) = One who blinks.

T'other *blinkard* trips

At his mooned sandal ; already used in « *Paracelsus* ».

CARROCH : (I 318 ; III 290 ; IV 350)

a waggon drawn by oxen, painted in red, bearing an alarm bell, the city standard and an altar on which the priest ministered. Invented by Eribert Archbishop of Milan about 1039 (Hallam) ; cf Sismondi Hist. of Ital. Repub. I.

COBSWAN : (II 932)

male swan from Anglo Saxon *cop* the top or head ;
(leading swan) (Johnson)

« Outsoar them, *cobswan* of the silver flock »

COIL : (I 380, III 407) Entanglement

Some thirty years before this evening's *coil*
How unravel your bad *coil* ?

Shelley had used the word in the « *Ode to West Wind* »
with the sense of turmoil.

CRANE : (I 709)

A cranium, a skull, i.e. the seed-vessel of the poppy
left bare when the petals had fallen off.

« A coarse brown rattling *crane* Lay bare ».

CRENELLED : (I 908) =

worn into holes, grooved, French *creneler* from Latin
crena a notch.

« On the stubs of living rock Ages ago it *crenelled* ».

CRESSET : (I 314)

Torch-lights, or lights from vessels of oil

« With sudden glare of *cressets* vented on the dark ».

CREEPERS : (II 829) =

Parasites

« Fifty *creepers* to elude at once ! »

CRINE : (III 475) =

mane ; meaning Palma's golden hair —

« or is this lion's *crine* so weak a graft ».

CRUCE : (VI 300) =

crucible or melting-pot

« Then subject, nor scruple, to your *cruce*

The world's discardings ».

ENROUGHES : (I 130)

To enrough = to make rougher

« The aroused hurricane ere it *enroughs*
The sea ».

FILAMOT : (II 715)

Colour of dead leaf — (*feuille-morte*) (allusion to Vidal,
see Sismondi — Lit. of Europe chap. V)

« Let Vidal change, or any other fool,
His murrey-coloured robe for *filamot* ».

FULGURANT : (V 43),

flashing with lightning.

« Careful Jove's face be duly *fulgurant* ».

LENTISK : (IV 825)

Pistachia lentisens, the tree from which mastic is extri-
cated, growing in the Levant on the Mediterranean
shores.

« Where I set her Moorish *lentisk* ».

LOSEL : (III 789, 795) =

a worthless fellow

« Keeping each *lozel*, through a maze of lies,
His own conceit of truth »

Empowered the *lozel* clutch one pleasure ».

LOTUS : (VI 386) Water-lily of Egypt.

« Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair ! »

MALAPERT, V 510, unskilful

MERIBAH : (III 830)

Place where the children of Israel were supplied with
water from the rock by Moses — See Bible, Numbers
XX — 13 cf Exodus XVII — 7

« Mark ye the dim first oozings ? *Meribah* ! »

MINIVER : (IV 787)

Variegated fur.

MOONFERN : (III 2)

Another form for *moonwort* = hemionitis, supposed to have healing or appeasing qualities.

MORTISED : (IV 559) = grafted

MURREY : (II 715)

Here means, simply, *coloured*, generally mulberry coloured, i.e. dark-red.

NARE : (IV 59)

A nostril, from the Latin *naris* the plural nares hence the sense of *nose*.

NOCTURNS : (IV 969)

In the early Christian Church, a service consisting of psalms and prayers held at midnight or day-break.

OUNCE : (I 166)

A kind of Leopard, lighter in colour with longer fur and less distinct spots (Encyclopedia Britannica).

PAULICIAN : (II 865)

Those who adopted the creed of the Paterini who interpreted the Bible according to their own ideas.

PERDUE : (V 32)

Lost. cf Lear IV. 7

PHANAL : (IV 989)

A beacon-light (cf Paracelsus).

PLECTRE : (II 740)

or *Plectrum*, a gigantic ivory wand for striking the lyre (cubit = 18 inches)

POINTEL : (V 130) The fleur de Lys.

PURPLES : (V 295)

Another name for *lucerne* ; here a synonym for regal clothes, hence royal power or dignity.

Pyx : (I 590)

A box or casket (from Latin *Buxos* = box tree)

QUITCHGRASS : (IV 23)

Couchgrass

« The thoroughfares were overrun with weed

Docks, *quitchgrass* ».

RAUNCE : (VI 781)

or rance, early modern English term for marble gravel:

« was trailed

To death through *raunce* and bramble bush ».

RONDEL : (II 516)

A thirteen line-verse poem in which the beginning is repeated in the third and fourth verses.

SCAPULAR : Monk's cowl — « Enfold the scanty grey serge *scapular* ». IV 595.

STIBADIUM : (V 17)

A Roman reclining couch used in the baths.

SWEETLING : A term of endearment, for a beloved person ; a small sweet thing. See Revelation X-9-10 *Take it, and eat it up ; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey.*

TENON : (V 225)

End of a piece of wood cut so as to leave a third of the thickness.

TENZON : (II 516, 686)

A contest in verse before a tribunal of love.

TETCHY : (II 1010)

touchy, irritable

« Had not the *tetchy* race prescriptive right ? »

TINCT : (III 17)

colour, or dye.

« How the *tinct* loosening escapes »

TRABEA : (V 296)

The purple robe of state worn by the Roman Consuls.

« Like edges of a *trabea* ».

TRENCH : (V 205) = to entrench upon.

« We *trench* upon the future ». [Continued page 100]

B) — Browning, in *Sordello*, has moreover not a few imitations or reminiscences of *Shakespeare's terms*.

Book I

Affect : The Lombard League

of fifteen cities that *affect* the Pope (verse III-112)

cf In bried, Sir, study what you most *affect* Two
Gent of V. (107, V).

Fern-seed : Eat *fern-seed* and peer beside us I 693

cf « We have the receipt of *fern-seed*,

We walk invisible » — Shakespeare Henry IV Act
III 105.

Fleering : Till Autumn spoiled their *fleering* quite
with rain I 708

cf « You speak to Casca, and to such a mass

That is no *fleering* tell-tale. Julius Cæsar I III.

Book III

Spilth : anything spilled (cf Tilth = soil tilled)

Burned like a *spilth* of light (verse 90)

cf. « when our vaults have wept

With drunken *spilth* of wine » *Timon of Athens*
II II.

Shent : Shall your friend be *shent* ? (verse 746)

cf. : « However in myriads soever she be *shent* »
Hamlet, III, scene II.

Cautelous : *Cautelous* old Redbread =

« Swear priests, and cowards and men *cautelous* »
Julius Caesar II I.

BOOK IV

Share : « I had to *share myself*

In fifty portions like an o'ertasked elf » (verse 772)
cf « Tempest » (Ariel speaking) :

« I flamed amazement : sometimes *I'd divide*

And burn in many places » Tempest, Act I sc. 2.

Whist : All voices *whist*, all eyes were sharpened
(verse 689)

cf. The wild waves *whist* — Tempest Act I sc. 2.

BOOK V

censure : Who'll subscribe

To a trite *censure* of the minstrel tribe ? (verse 404)

jigging fools :

cf « What should the wars do with these *Jigging*
fools ?

Companions hence ! » (Julius Caesar IV sc. III).

mere breath

curses : With good wishes, *no mere breath*'

cf « *Macbeth* » : *Curses* not loud but deep, *mouth*
honour ;

writhled : Too *writhled* but, — the main thing, young
(V. verse 718).

It cannot be this weak and *writhled* shrimp

Should strike such terror to his adversaries »

(Henry VI II III).

TRIAD : (V 650)

Statues on St Mark's at Venice of the three patron
saints of Venice (St Mark, St Pantaleon, St Lawrence)
« The all transmuting *triad* blaze
Above ».

TRINE : (IV 603)

To trine = to assuyme a trinal aspect to form an angle
of 120 degrees)
« Once Jove *trined* for her ».

VIRLAI : (II 517)

A short poem wholly in two rhymes.
« In *rondel*, *tenzon*, *virlai* or *sirvent* ».

WEFT : (II 100) = curl

« one *weft* of which
Golden and great, quite touched his cheek ».

WRITHEN : (I 291)

Old form of past participle of writhe to deform, to dis-
tort.

WRITHLED : (V 718)

Wrinkled, drawn in.
« Besides, too *writhled*, — but, the main thing, young ».

Addenda :

Amaranth — I 371 an imaginary flower, supposed ne-
ver to fade cf. Milton P. Lost IV. 300.

Rosary — A string of beads for keeping count of devo-
tions (I-439).

Twy-fork — III 1101 — A stick branched so as to stand
for the cross.

Woe worth I 583 — Archaic form = woe betide !

V - Browning also borrows out-of-the-way words or expressions from various other writers, that cause some perplexity to readers.

I. To Egg :

Egging the rabble on to disavow IV 702

cf ; Adam and Eve he *egged* to ille

(Piers Ploughman Passus I)

II. Overmatch :

At the announcement of this *overmatch* IV 763

cf England... hath been an *overmatch*

Bacon = *Essay on The True Greatness of Kingdoms*.

Impertinence : (Latin sense) = beside the point

What *impertinence* in me so to express it II 603

IV. Purfle (III 900)

cf Phœbus, with his golden beames gent

Has *purfellit* and painted pleasantlie

(Robert Henryson : Preaching of the Swallow).

V. Rathe-ripe (II 731)

cf : « Too *rathe*, cut off by practice criminall speaker »

Spenser F Queen III

Bring the *rathe* primrose that forsaken dies ; Milton

(Lycidas).

Griding (I 67) ; cutting

cf So sore the *griding* sword — Milton, P. Lost.

Speckled (V 1013) tainted

« Is Squarcialupo *speckled* ? »

cf And *speckled* vanity

Will sicken soon and die

Milton, Ode on Nativity.

Reate = water crow foot cf « Let the pond dry six or twelve

months to kill the water lilies randocks, *reate* and
bulrushes that breed there

(*Walton's Complete Angler*).

Writhen (I 291) distorted

While his lord lifted *writhen* hands to pray

To impend used transitively (VI 816)

cf Shelley Zastrozzi. « *Ware* (= beware of)

The alarming danger which impended her ».

Swound And when it came with eyes filmed as in *swound*

IV 80

cf : « It cracked and growled and roared and howled »

Like noises in a *swound*. (COLERIDGE, *Ancient Mariner*.)

Flinders III 602 (small fragments)

Bloom-flinders and fruit sparkles and leaf-dust

cf VI 100 :

Flinders enrich the land, veins swell the rock.

Fastuous = (proud ; Latin *fastus* = pride.

I had stalked *fastuous* as any III 738.

Mollitious (= soft) III 129

Here *mollitious* alcoves.

VI - Biblical words and Sentences are found in Sordello ; Browning's knowledge of the Bible was most thorough. It had been, even as for Ruskin, his daily intellectual food when he was a boy. No wonder then, if we find numerous Biblical allusions and quotations in the poem. Thus in the First Book there is a very close imitation of a passage in Ezekiel 2-V. 14. « *And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning* » which we find in the line ; « Up and down ran arrowy fire etc » (I-522).

In the Second Book, Sordello is compared to St. John, « this foot on the land, that on the sea, with, open in his hand, a bitter sweetling of a book » in a verse which recalls Revelation 10-2. « *And I saw another Mighty angel come down from heaven clothed with a cloud... and he had in his hand a little book open — and he set his right foot in the sea and his left foot on the earth* ».

Book Three contains by far the greatest number of passages inspired by the Bible ; words that appear strange to those who have only a surface acquaintance with the Holy Writ crop up suddenly ; *Meribah* (1) *Zin* (2) *Promised Land* ; *Potiphar* (3) ; *Ass* (4) ; *Potsherd him Gibeonites* ! (5) etc... Indeed in language they recall passages in

Carlyle's « *Sartor Resartus* » (see, for instance Book II chap. IX).

(1) Exodus XVII-7

(2) Numbers XX-1

(3) Genesis XXXIX

(4) Numbers XXII-28

(5) Joshua IX-10 also Jude V-9.

Book I — verse 365 John's Vision : Rev. XV-2

Book III — 783 Yet God spoke of right hand, foot and eye — cf St Matthew V-29, 31.

VII. — FAMILIAR TERMS.

Browning makes use of the most familiar terms :

Bit by Bit : What was stored *bit by bit* (V-454)

Bustle : To which, despite his *bustle*, he is linked (IV-822)

Chuckle : He'd rock as in a drunkenness or *chuckle* now (IV-644)

Cast about for : Then he *cast about for* terms to tell him
(IV-961)

Chew the cud : And *chew the cud* (II-838)

Clean out of reach : Rome, *clean out of reach* (IV-1007)

Egging on : *Egging* the rabble on (IV-702)

Finger-ends : Had Montfort at, completely, so to speak,
His *finger-ends* (II-681).

Fooled : Who, *fooled* no longer, free in fancy ran (II-660).

Fall plumb : As all *fell plumb* to purpose (V-354)

Flea ; Louse : Your louse For love, your flea
for hate (II-823-824)

Hanker after : *Hankering after* a boy's preferment (IV-846)

Leave in the lurch :

Leave old temples *in the lurch* (IV-1019)

Maw : In a sated *maw* (V-443)

Scare : Much that *scared me* (IV-906)

Not know : *Not know* Crescentius ! (IV-960)

Shuffle : *Shuffle* from their seat (IV-841) (active sense)

Speck and brack : Keeping from *speck and brack* (V-64)

Squabbling : Idly *squabbling* thus (IV-957)

Stick together : That we should *stick together* (IV-697).

Take at word : *Taking* the people *at their word* (IV-697).

Conceit the knack : (V-423)

Want the knack : Those... *want the knack* (V-64).

Thumb : To the last fool who

Turned him round his *thumb* (II-833).

CHAPTER TWO

SENTENCES

I - Repetitions

II - Antitheses

CHAPTER TWO

SENTENCES

The first thing that strikes us in « *Sordello* » is the great *variety* in its sentences.

§ I. — They are of various *lengths*.

- a) Browning is fond of exclamations and interjections, thus bringing a whole sentence down to *one* word. eg:
Conceive ! (I.657) = Conceive it if you can !
Strange ! (II.129) = How strange it was !
Fortunate ! (II. 397) = Fortunate man that you are !
Fool ! (I. 567) = Fool that I am !
- b) Again two words only are needed in interrogative forms of which he makes a frequent use :
His story ? (I. 2)¹ = Is it his story ?
What matter ? (I. 796) = What does that matter ?
Ye believe ? (I.10) = What I say ?
In truth ? (I. 548) = Is it so in truth ?
Whose fault ? (I. 535) = Whose fault is it ?
See you (I. 237) = Do you see what I mean ?
Also with the note of exclamation :
My audience ! (I. 49) = Such is my audience.
Time fleets ! (I. 863) = Time fleets quickly by.
Time stole ! (I. 928) = idem
Ages slip ! (IV. 140) = idem

- c) Sometimes the interrogative, though short, is a little longer yet it is still elliptical :

Ah, but Sordello ? (I.443) = Ah, but what about Sordello ?

Next age —, what to do ? (V. 601) = In the next age, what would one have to do ?

When an incisive form is required the sentence is reduced to three words :

Vain, most vain (VI. 169, 170)

Such he slew (I. 890).

Compare with Shakespeare :

Off with his head ! (Richard III).

- d) Many sentences take up only one line of verse :

Who will, may hear Sordello's story told. I. 1 (cf. I.603)

And you shall hear Sordello's story told. (III. 1022).

Who would, has heard Sordello's story told. (VI-886).

A spendthrift in the spring no summer greets. VI-180.

- e) Another of the characteristics of Browning is to make Verses in which there is a string of nouns following one another, e.g.

And snatches, song and story, dreams, scraps, perhaps
I.757 8

Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain, I. 768

Among the hills and vales and plains and groves II 270

As who should pierce hill, plain, grove, glade II, 463.

These are in reality only subjects or objects of sentences

Like Milton too he is fond of making lists of names

simply for the sound they give to the line :

Treville, Villarozzi, Puissolo

Loria Cartiglione ! V. 681-2

Godego's Lord, Ramon Marostica
Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria I I. 251-2
Compare Milton :

« In fable or romance of Uther's son,
Begirt with British or Armoric knights
And all who since, baptized or infidel,
Jousted in Aspremont or Trebisonde
Of whom Biserte sent from Afric shore », etc...

Sentences are, on the other hand, much longer than in the usual decasyllabic lines, because Browning, like all the Romantics, was desirous of breaking with the monotony of the couplet. Sometimes they affect the form of a paragraph, running on from one line to another, above all in the passages where direct speech is employed, for instance when Palma is speaking :

The day I was betrothed to Boniface, etc. III, 507-515.
or again in soliloquies such as Taurello's, where the whole period is contained between the same word used at the beginning of the sentence and again at the end. eg. :
« *Flowers* » — « *Flowers* ».

« Flowers one may tease, etc... (IV. 824-833)
And now where is it, where can you avoid
The *Flowers* ? IV. 823-831.

With « *Flowers* » inserted in the middle : « We trod those *flowers* (827).

This Kind of sentence is often used by Browning when he wishes to insist on a particular idea.

Thus in Book II the idea of « *song* » is exposed :

Let me perceive
What I can do, a mastery believe

Asserted and established to the throng
By their selected evidence of *song*. (Verse 432).

Song, not deeds,

was chosen.

But he would give and take on *song's* one point. 451.

Other examples are to be found in Bk. I.

« *Beauty* » 485, *Beauty* 495 ; *Leprosy* 566, *Leprosy* 585.

Judgment 677, *Judgments* 717 ; *judgment* 721.

Offices 700, *offices* 721, etc...

§ II. — Their *construction* is no less varied :

a) In the order of words.

It would seem that he treats language as an imperfect vehicle (1) of thought that requires forcing and from which he is determined to obtain the utmost. This is why in reading him we often seek in vain the ordinary logical sequence of words. eg.

But who divines what glory coats overclasp
Of the bulb dormant in the mummy's grasp
Taurello sent. (II-21.220)

We find after examining the sentence that it should be construed as follows ; who divines what coats (may) overclasp the glory of the bulb dormant in the mummy's grasp, etc...

Thus in a sentence a word, according to the sense and value he gives it, seems to be able to occupy almost any place. Let us take for instance an adverb such as *never*

(1) In several passages of « *Sordello* » he alludes to this =
Even if some wondrous vehicle expressed the whole dream
« (II-603) cf. 631, 654 = *The vehicle never sufficient.* », etc.

which generally is placed between the subject and the verb, it is with Browning shifted about constantly, e.g. :

A pageant time repeats *Never* again (III. 210)

= *never* again repeats

Never of what they promised yet could I get

A glimpse (III-157-159) = I could *never*

and again :

Rival's foot had spurned *never*... (V-775)

Here are a few other examples, taken at random :
« *What* difference betwixt this Rome and Ours ? resemblance *what* ? between that scurvey dumb show and this pageant sheen ? » (V. 46)

The « *what* », after being placed at the beginning of the first sentence is placed after « *resemblance* » in the second.

These, fail to recognize, to arbitrate

Between, henceforth, to rightly estimate

Thus marshalled in the masque ! (V-597-600)

The demonstrative *these* should, in reality, be *after* the two first lines as it depends on : « *Thus marshalled* » etc... and the adverb, « *rightly* », should *not* be between the preposition « *to* » and its infinitive.

But, not only do we find that Browning inserts *words* in unexpected places but that he also inserts *sentences* one inside the other, in the most surprising way. Here is a typical example :

« *Nor turned he, till Ferrara's din*

(Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip,

Who lets some first and eager purpose slip »

*In a new fancy's birth — the speech keeps on,
Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone) (VI-16-21)
— Aroused him.*

Thus, a sentence that takes up *one* line is cut into two halves by a sentence of four lines ! Another example, here given, is quite as striking, but more intricate :

« What if, now the scene,
« Draws to a close, yourself have really been,
« You, plucking purples in Goito's moss,
« Like edges of a trabea (not to cross
« Your consul - humour) or dry aloë-shafts
« For fasces, at Ferrara, he, fate wafts,
« This very age, her whole inheritance
Of opportunities ? (V. 293-299)

The sense is complicated by five things :

a) *dash* ; b) *the brackets* ; c) *the change of pronoun*, (you = he) ; d) *the absence of the relative* ; e) and *the absence of a second pair of brackets*. When once this has been perceived the sense becomes clear... i-e : « What if (now that the scene draws to a close, *you, yourself*, who are at present plucking purples (1) in Goito's moss, like edges of a trabea, (so as not to cross your consul-humour), or dry aloë-shafts, for fasces at Ferrara, is he, whom fate wafts, etc...

b) In the separation of words from one another.

One of the peculiarities of Browning consists in separating words from one another when they ought to be close

(1) A play upon the words : purple flowers (lucern) symbol of authority.

together, by throwing in between them long sentences or clauses so that one cannot easily follow the sense because one has lost sight of the subject, or verb. or objects. e.g.

Forth *glided* — not alone
Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,
Nor *Adelaïde* bent double o'er a scroll
One maiden at her knees, that eve, his soul
Shook as he stumbled through the arras'd glooms
On them for, 'mid quaint robes, and weird perfumes
Started the meagre Tuscan up — her eyes
The maidens' also, bluer with surprise)
But the entire outworld... (I-748-756).

Here the verb « *glided* » is separated first of all from « *Adelaïde* » by two lines, but from the rest of the sentence by five other lines.

He bade the tender ferns invest
Primeval pines, o'er canopy his couch,
And most of all *his fame* — (shall I avouch
Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,
And laughed as from his brow Sordello took
The crown and laid on the bard's breast and said
It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head ?)
continue..... (II-282-89)

Here the verb « *continue* » is all alone by itself, and so far from its subject « *his fame* » that we lose sight of the meaning.

Again, even when there are no Brackets or Parentheses we have often a verb separated from its conjunction by several lines. eg. :

And laughs, because he guesses !

Then come 7 lines of text between *guesses* and « THAT he has reached its boundary » IV-869-875.

Such sentences of course disconcerted early readers, but we get accustomed to them after a few minutes reflection.

Repetitions

Repetitions in « *Sordello* » are of various kinds :

- a) At times Repetition consists in repeating a word by means of an antithesis *Restlessly at rest* I-966,
- b) Such antitheses will often be recalled from book to book :

Its businesses in *blood* and *blaze* this year II-464
And *deed* with *deed*, *blaze*, *blood* with *blood* and *blaze*
IV-934

Of what result ? In *blaze* and *blood* VI-694

Saint this simpered past in sanctity

Sinner the other flared portentous by II-529, 530

What seems a *fiend* perchance may prove a *saint* III-988

Apprehend which *sinner* is, which *saint* V-598.

- c) Browning is particularly fond of repeating certain *words* that have for him a deep sense. Therefore they return not only in « *Sordello* » at intervals, but are repeated from « *Pauline* » or « *Paracelsus* ».

Pauline

From out thy soul as from a sacred *star* 15

Scare deeming thou wast as a *star* to *men* 171

As if you wandered o'er

The white way for a *star* 402

Paracelsus

To become a *star* to men for ever I-527

Sordello

Amass the scintillations, make one *star*. VI-69

Pauline

I shall be *priest* and *prophet* 1019

Paracelsus

I am *priest* °I-801 cf. « Prophet » III, 253.

If he be *priest* II-803.

Pauline

Some *one* end 605

Paracelsus

To gain *one* prize in place of *many* I-275

To contemplate some *one* truth I-555

(see for further examples Chapter on « *Links* »)

d) Again *whole verses* are repeated e.g.

1) Constant as eve he came

To sit beside each in her turn, the same

As one of them, a certain space (*Sordello* : I-429-431)

Constant as eve he came

To sit by its attendant girls the same

As one of them V-707-709

2) While songs go up exulting, then dispread

Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead

Like an escape of angels ! I-881-883

My rhymes that spring, dispread

Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead

Like an escape of angels ! III-543-595

3) Does that one man sleep whose brow

The dying lamps-flame sinks and rises o'er ? I-328

Though no affirmative disturbs the head
A dying lamp flame sinks and rises o'er III-552-553

4) Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear
So close and smooth are laid / the few fine locks
Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sun-blanced the livelong summer / II-152-155

/The few fine locks
Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sun-blanced the livelong summer /

Ely's hair
And head that's sharp and perfect like a pear
So smooth and close are laid / the few fine locks
Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sun-blanced the livelong summer / V-961-970

Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,
And that sky-space of water, ray for ray,
And star for star, one richness where they mixed
As this and that wing of an angel fixed
Tumultuary splendours folded in
To die VI-565-569

This passage recalls : (1)

(1) Compare in Tennyson the Brook : the repetition :
*« Her Eyes a bashful azure and her hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut when the shell
Divides three — fold to show the fruit within... »*

*On Eyes a bashful azure and on hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut when the shell
Divides three fold to show the fruit within ».*

A breadth of watery heaven like a bay
 A sky-like space of water, ray for ray
 And star for star, one richness where they mixed
 As this and that wing of angel, fixed
 Tumultuary splendours folded in
 To die

VI-11-16

e) Besides these passages certain *words* are repeated from book to book :

a) Orblike : III-326

Orb. III-334 cf. VI-76

b) Watching with an *earnest smile* I-450

The *earnest smile* is gone I-968

c) The *moon*, like features of a face II-952

Soon he was low muttering beneath the *Moon* III-974

Nor *moon* is it, Apollo, now etc... III-50

A passage clear

For any meagre and discoloured *moon* IV-888

Stark rough lines V-1017

The *moon* breaks through .

Like yonder slow *moon* VI-29 et VI-42 et 60

This is an imitation of Keats see « Endymion » *passim*.
Essence V.510, 532.

§ II. — REPETITIONS are used also *closely together* to drive in the emphasis intended :

NOUNS : Not absolutely fitted to evince its *mastery*... I. 560
 565.

The *mastery* (that) another life should learn.

Also they serve to link : a) ideas and ; b) sentences :

a) *Cloud* after *cloud* III 18.

b) *Men*, *men* III (20-25 enclosing paragraph.)

Then what further use of *will* ? III 34.

Will and the means to show *will* III 45. (enclosing parag.)

At times they march two by two :

Ladder, *ladder*... III 143, 155 (enclosing paragraph.)

Platform... *platform*... III 144, 156 form apposition to ladder.

PRONOUNS : following at a short distance, yet in apposition:

As ever round *each new* discovery...

As might enable *each* to stand alone I 638, 643.

ADJECTIVES : followed by noun and verb, so as to form apposition of noun (face, voice)

The last face glances III 24

the last voice murmurs III 25

Repetitions are sometimes accidental and consequently awkward :

Blind, blind (the 3d blind is accidental) in III 127, 134, 146.

VERBS :

As yet that fast friend *sleeps*, and he too *sleeps* I 132

f ~~If~~ *I should falter* (now) *If I should falter* now I 347, 372
(verb serving to enclose a long paragraph.)

Existence *cannot* satiate (notice balancing of two last words.) *cannot surprise* I 541, 542.

Die, fair and foul, *die* (here again the two pairs of adjectives are in apposition).

Seemly and ignoble *die* III 22.

Wait, waits, waited, awaited III 97, 107, 142, 149.

The idea of *waiting* thus permeates the whole 50 odd lines.

§ III. — REPETITIONS USED AS CONNECTING LINKS.

Browning has been accused, by more than one critic, and even by his wife, of leaving *Sordello* without connecting links.

Now it appears to us that on the contrary the work is very closely knit together. His paragraphs are complete in themselves, and each paragraph contains sign-posts, so to say, showing what are the main ideas treated in it. These paragraphs, succeeding one another are linked by connections which become apparent if we only take the trouble to analyse the sentences as they succeed one another.

A careful study of « *Sordello* » will show how, once on his way, Browning never loses sight of his ideas, recalls them to his attentive reader at every stage of his journey by a skilful use of *frequent Reiteration*. This brings us to : *The Links in Sordello* :

At first they appear only as allusions.

Let us, to make our meaning clear take an example :

The full purport of the word « *friendless people-friend* » in verse 4 Book I is only clearly perceived when we come to realize that the whole poem concerns the *friendship* *Sordello* comes, finally, to feel for his fellow-creatures. Thus the Poem starts with the idea of *sympathy* and thus the idea of this *friendship*, of *love*, will pervade the whole poem and the word *love* will be found all along used in the altruistic sense (1) confirmed at every stage by the terms *service*, *serve*, etc... it implies.

(1) Or on the contrary with that of self-love, the better to bring out by antithesis the love of the other kind ; human and

The first four hundred lines of the First Book are introductory, but, after them, three or four main ideas run through the whole Book ; the idea of *Perception*, of the exterior world, and the absence of *Judgment on Sordello's* part. (678-679) (719-722). His *dreaming* vegetative life wherein his *Imagination* plays the principal part. If one analyses the different stages of the development of his personality we see how all the language of the Book is subordinated to these ideas. So that, as he develops, his *selfishness* becomes more and more *self-centred* and he attributes his own qualities to surrounding objects, which are finally personified by him. He thus gets to imagine himself superior to them all as he is their creator, and finally looks upon himself as an *Apollo* uniting in his person all human qualities, physical moral and intellectual (1). So throughout the first book not only certain *terms*, but definite *paragraphs* continue to keep us aware of the sadly false conception Sordello has of himself.

As soon as we get to the Second Book things change for Sordello. He wakes up to *reality*. Then comes the struggle between his overweeningness which received a damp when he learns on one hand that he is of humble birth, and on the other the hard hits he gets from the world. But his vanity and his faith in his pre-eminence continue. In Book Three he gradually begins to perceive, thanks to Palma, that his duty is to come into contact with the world of men. In Book Four the horrors of war bring him close up against the *masses*. He now sincerely

altruistic. See in Book I 485 ; 730 ; 777 ; Book II 439 ; Book IV 116-333 ; Book VI 82-594 etc.

(1) Strength, Grace, Wisdom repeated constantly in Book I.

wants to help them, fancies he can find relief for them when suddenly the irony of things places him in a position to become a man of *action* and influence in the world, (Book V). But, alas ! he cannot, for (Book VI) circumstances make him pay the price with his life.

Every stage in his development is marked by terms that like fingerposts along the way, point out to us the stages of his spiritual evolution. Thus to the terms and the ideas pertaining to *Sense and Perception* in Book I succeed those pertaining to *Thought* throughout Book II. On the other hand the term « *Apollo* », that had appeared only at the end of Book One now recurs as a *leit motif* from time to time in (Book II-76-310-377-383-600-614).

Other terms which are also meant to show us he has been unable as yet to give up his idea of reigning over his fellow-creatures, recur regularly : Monarch (355) Mastery (360) Mastery (365). (430) *Monarch* (830) side by side with the manifestation of Apollonian qualities : *Grace* and *Strength* (58) *Strength, Grace, Wisdom* (362) *Strength, Beauty Grace* (1) (389) *Perception, Thought* (590) *think : perceived* ; (122) he pondered ; (168) he *thought* (1000).

In Book III he realises the necessity of at least some adjustment between *Ideals and Experience*, of *Life with Spirituality*. Hence the words : *Life* (140) *Happiness* (145-162-171) *Joy* side by side with : *Self-display* (651) *Self-reflectings* (668) *Self-revelment* (702) *Delight* (138) *Blisses* (156) *Joys* (178) etc...

Again in Book Four we have the same sort of links making clear Sordello's endeavours to find out *how to serve Mankind* : *Aloof from men* (186) *without them* (236) *Mankind* (206) *Mankind* (198) *Mankind* (206) *Mankind* (251)

Mankind (276) *Mankind* (280) *Crowd* (189) *Crowds* (241-242) etc... etc... Now, when we notice that these terms starting with the first Book (1) run right through the whole work, we understand the strong connecting links that hold the whole work together somewhat like the shrubs that he describes in Book IV, which, inserted among the trees bind them all into one vast tree (verse 119-121).

Thus the word *Will*, especially, beginning at Book I (verse 541) « wanting a *will* » — and continuing through all the Books, even as the life blood courses through the arteries of the body, gives the main meaning of the various aspirations of Sordello's soul, one which has the latent power of genius but which, alas, never resolved itself into action, because he was in spite of his genius a dreamer - lacking essentially in *Will*-power.

§ IV. — REPETITIONS USED THROUGHOUT PARAGRAPHS

It has often been noticed that Browning shows himself as lavish in the use of words on one hand as he is chary of them on the other. Thus he never hesitates to repeat a term as many times as is necessary when this is really required to obtain a fuller appreciation of his meaning.

For instance in Book V verse 85 when once the word *sight* has been used to mark what God reveals to man as his duty to see, i.e. that his work is of two kinds : on the one hand, that of the present moment, that of the individual man, the « *minute* task », as he calls it, and on the

(1) For instance : Fair or Good or Wise or Strong recalled from Book I (534) *Strength Wisdom Grace* (765) Apollo (898) (912) (921).

other hand, that of the completion of the general plan mapped out for all Eternity for Mankind to accomplish, the « *Whole task* ». Thus this *whole* is composed of a series of *Parts*, or *steps*, marking how gradual must be the accomplishment of God's *entire* plan.

Therefore to impress this fact thoroughly on the minds of his readers, Browning first of all, constantly repeats the word *step*, wishing us to bear in mind carefully the necessity that there is for everyone of us not to « *skip* » anyone of these, each being as indispensable as every link is in a chain. The words will be made to recur time after time, and when the turn of the one that has to replace it comes, the new term will then be repeated, being no less important than the preceding one. Now these new terms will in the passage be those that show how the gradual *Evolution* of Mankind is brought about, by the successive efforts of generations succeeding one another.

In this manner he calls our attention to the next important fact *that collective man outstrips the individual*. These ideas are of the utmost importance, and those that the individual man is only too apt to lose sight of. They cannot therefore be too much stressed upon by the writer, and he is consequently justified in weighing upon them.

He, next, has to show how wrong Sordello was in seeking to replace, by idle *dreaming* about himself, the real contribution of his exceptional powers to the furthering of the *work* God has ordained to be done by and for each of his creatures. Again, even supposing the dreamer has at last woke up and come to the conclusion that he may possibly manage to influence the Multitude by his practical intervention, can he possibly imagine that it is

the very first time that anyone has ever done the like ? Others before him have helped the masses efficaciously in giving them by means of a *spiritual idea*, by concretizing their vague perceptions into a *symbol*, thus enabling them to concentrate their efforts. A king, Charlemagne, was one of these, he who gave them the *Lily flower* as an emblem, as a symbol round which to flock, Charlemagne who is the incarnation himself of strength obtained by stress of strength. He grouped the scattered units of mankind, just as a few centuries later a great man, of the Church this time, Hildebrand, gave them another ideal to revere.

Each piece of work accomplished thus is but a *step* forward. Again the term changes, even as the epoch, and we are given to understand that each result thus obtained is but the *scaffolding* of some still greater work in the future round which other generations labour. This scaffold can be done away with as soon as the desired result has been obtained, which leads on to a further *step* ; *Strength by stress of Knowledge*. Browning, consequently, *has* to repeat these same words over and over again to impress these most important facts on the minds of his readers. Hence his many repetitions that shortsighted readers have taken for mere verbosity. So, if we continue to read this wonderful fifth Book in the proper spirit, where is shown the sense of the entire Evolution of Humanity we understand exactly *where* She at present stands, what has been accomplished in the past and what remains to be done in the future, and how, after the influence of men of *action*, the turn comes to men of *thought*, and among these, chiefly to the greatest of all, that is to say, to the Poet.

He it is who has to teach others to see *what* he sees and, to learn in time, *how* to acquire his gift of seeing. Until Humanity has learned this lesson, ~~it~~ will go on suffering, and therefore needs, meanwhile, help and a lessening of its fearful woes.

§ V. — LITERARY REPETITIONS

More essentially Literary, Repetitions (1) are so very numerous in Browning's « *Sordello* » that it is quite impossible to explain every one of them separately but we may take an example or two to show the use the writer makes of them to enforce his meaning :

a) *Nouns*

In book IV the word *cause*, for instance, is repeated in the last paragraph but one. (verse 898-951).

We are shown in these lines how *Sordello* comes to the conclusion that to him will be given to discover what the People's *Cause* in reality is. Therefore Browning repeats this term at intervals in the paragraph = Your *cause* Verse 896 ; what if Azzo, too, supports a *cause*... what *cause* ? 929. What if there remained a *cause* distinct ?

Next, to show that there are three separate conceptions in opposition to one another Browning opposes and repeats not only the *nouns* which stand for the defenders of each cause *Salinguerra*, (*The Ghibellins*) 897-944, *Azzo*, (*the Guelfs*) 931, 933 but the *possessive adjectives* and the *pos-*

(1) We understand by Literary Repetitions those in which *several* kinds of repetitions combine to produce a given effect, every part of speech being repeated if it is necessary in view of the most effectual and artistic bodying-forth of the idea.

sessive pronouns indicating *Sordello*, *Palma* (as the other fraction), « *Your cause* » 896. *My* multitude 902, *Your* design, *your* party, *your* profit, Tell *me* ; assure *me* ; *my* youth, *their* welfare ; *I* ; *he* ; *my* race, *my* spirit's force ; *these*, *them*, *People*, 920, *People* 936 ; « *Multitude* » 932 and « *party* », « *parties* », show the help he gets from *antithesis* as well, so as to heighten the effect. And finally the repetition of the Adverbs « *why* », « *why* » ; and verbs « *do* » « *done* », gives animation to his dilemma in having to choose between the two, which are, finally, opposed in « *these* » and « *me* ».

Examined from this point of view the passage reveals itself with its parts all most firmly knit together, and links itself up with the former passage where the word « *Cause* » was used in connection with the idea of « *service* » to be rendered (verses 293 and 325 of Bk IV).

Pronouns

In Book V also we find the continual repetition of the personal pronoun *I*, from the verse 473, onward.

This is to show that at last *Sordello* has woke up to the necessity of asserting *himself*, his *Ego*, for he knows that he is The Poet, destined from all eternity to stand preeminent among mankind. The repetition of the personal pronoun only ends when Browning himself breaks in to rail at him ; with the exclamation : « *Why ! he writes Sordello* » :

Now, the « *I* » is buttressed, so to say, and backed up, by the personal pronouns and possessive adjectives which underline its importance : e.g. with *antithesis*) *Thine*, *my*, *his*, *his*, *me*, *thee*, *he*, *my*, *my*, *thee*, *thee thy*, *thee*, *my*,

my purpose, *my* task (551). Then by the noun : *king*, royalty, king, kingship, diadem *king*, The verbs in their turn bring out his supremacy, *compel obey, measure* thee with the Minstrel ! then *demur* ! etc...

And notice how the paragraph has at the beginning the term Minstrel 482. Song in the middle 560 Song. 581 to end with *Sordello*, Browning = the Poet !

§ VI. — ANTITHESES.

We find in « *Sordello* » antitheses, not only from the very first lines but throughout the poem. The fact is significant in itself. It shows that the case is the same as for the « *Repetitions* ». Both are purposely employed by the writer for a definite reason, i. e. to insist because emphasis is required to drive in his meaning. Redundancy used in this manner and which cannot be ascribed to carelessness or verbosity has its own justification being a means towards an end.

Antithesis is found in every part of speech ; but of course it is employed more frequently in some parts of speech than in others, most of all in nouns, verbs and adjectives.

a) *Adjectives* :

Old, new ; I -272-273.

Worst, best, (expedient) ; I — 12, 13.

Fresh, pale, III — 79-80.

(used as noun) The dead, the quick. I-36 et 692-693.

Sometimes the double form is opposed to another ; pale-red, pale-blue III-695.

b) *Nouns* :

Heaven, Hell ; I-33.

Summer, Winter I-378, 379.

Time, Eternity I-566 cf. VI-473, 475.

Parts, Whole, VI-284.

Wrong, Right VI-546.

Virtue, Vice VI-470.

The Larger, the Less VI-471, etc...

At times nouns go in pairs and are inverted, eg :
castle, cot, cot, castle I-264-265.

At other times the antithesis is repeated again and again to bring out the deeper meaning of the text.

flesh II-398, soul 399.

flesh II-402, soul 402, 405.

These antitheses are carried on not only from sentence to sentence but from paragraph to paragraph and from book to book, e.g. :

Soul, Matter, VI-492.

Soul, VI-493, Matter, 494.

Soul, VI-494, Matter, 495.

Matter, 496, Soul, 498.

Here the antithesis, skilfully prepared in book I, verse 835 is carried on through each book till the sixth and last :
Flesh, soul II-398, 399 ; soul, body II-853, 854 ; body, soul 864 ; soul, body III-167, 168. Flesh, spirit III-173, 174.
Spirits, bodies III-388 ; Soul, body III-558-571, 720 ; Soul, body IV-203 ; body 250, soul 270 ; Soul, body V-151-153.

c) *Verbs* :

Concentrate, circumscribe, I-723.

Swell, I-724.

Think II-123 ; perceive, II-124.
Reconstruct II-600 ; destroy 601.
Hailed, 768, decried 768.
Pursue II-699, forswear 703 ;
Learn III 437, Teach 437.
Waxed III 439, waned 440.
Pursue III 486, commenced 487.
Pursue III 486, desists 487.
Shut, III 490 Ope 490.
Shrunk IV 559 ; prospered 560.
Uprose 650 down sank 651.
Raised IV 817, quelled 817.
Come near V 522, keep aloof 522.
Bare V 624 ; invest 624 (= sense of *cover*).
Dispense with V-630, accept 630.
Act V 723 ; dreamed 724.
Grew, VI 46 ; dwindled 47.
Down sank VI, 159 ; Uprose 157.
Hating, loved VI-215.
Advance, impede VI 212.
Waxed VI 802 ; waned VI 803.

§ VII. — REPETITIONS AND ANTITHESES COMBINED

If we take the passage from Browning's « *Sordello* » (Book V, verse 150-250) and contrast it with one from another great passionate soul, Lincoln, say for instance, his Second Inaugural Address (1), we realize that both writers employ the same method to enforce their meaning and impress their conviction on their readers.

(1) See Appendix II.

This method consists first of all in opposing not only words and sentences, but even paragraph to paragraph, and by repeating again and again whatever has to be driven into the listener's mind. Take any oration of Demosthenes or of Cicero, any masterpiece of Burke or Macaulay, and we shall find that the same means have been employed. But let us give, as examples, several passages from the work of a poet whose nature in many respects is very close to that of Browning, ie Milton ; from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to prove what we advance, for, although he is, as Browning, a poet, he has a didactic idea at heart to convey to his reader. And so his way of proceeding is identical with that of the other authors we have just quoted.

O *Hell* ! what do *mine* eyes with *grief* behold ?

Into our *room* of *bliss* thus high advanced,

Creatures of other mould, Earth-born perhaps,

Not Spirits, yet to Heavenly *Spirits* bright

Little inferior : when *my thoughts* pursue

With wonder and could love *so* lively *shines*

In them divine resemblance, and *such* grace

The hand that formed them on *their* shape hath poured.

Ah ! gentle pair...

Happy, but for so *happy* ill *secured*

Long to continue ; and this high seat, your *Heaven*...

I'll fenced for *Heaven* to keep out such a *foe*

As now is entered : yet no purposed *foe*

To *you*, whom *I* *pity* thus forlorn,

Though *I* *unpitied*. League with *you* *I* seek,

And mutual amity, *so* strait, *so* close,

That *I* with *you* must *dwell*, or *you* with *me*.

My *dwelling* haply may not please

Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such
Accept your Maker's work, *He* gave it *me*
Which *I* as freely *give* ; *Hell* shall unfold
To entertain *you two*, *her* widest gates,
And send forth all *her* kings ; there will be *room*
Not like these narrow limits, to receive
Your numerous offspring ; if no better place
Thank him, who puts *me* loath to this *revenge*
On *you* and wrong *me*, not for *him* who *wronged*
And should *I* at *your* harmless innocence
Melt, as *I* do, yet public reason just,
Honors and Empire with *revenge* enlarged
..... compel *me* now.

Now, in this first passage we have chosen, what does Milton wish to show ?

It is easy to get at his meaning if we pay attention to the words that are underlined.

Even while plotting against Adam and Eve, Satan cannot help pitying them and admiring them for their divine resemblance.

Notice the contrast between *grief* and *bliss* in lines 358, 359, as well as that between *delights*, verse 367, and *Woe* 368. And again *Heaven* opposed to *Hell* (V-381). Pity to unpitied : *I*, opposed to you, I, you.

In this passage the repetitions are even more frequent than the antitheses : *Spirits*, *spirits* ; *bright*, *shines* ; *divine woe*, *woe* : *happy*, *happy* ; (*secured* as a recollection of the word « *secure* » of a preceding passage of the same book (verse 186) *Heaven*, *heaven* ; *foe*, *foe* ; *pity* and *unpitied* ; *dwell*, *dwelling* ; *gave*, *give* ; *revenge*, *revenge*.

Thus, the whole passage is permeated by the contrast between the *bliss* contained in *Paradise* and in the *hearts* of Adam and Eve, and the *Hell* (« myself am Hell ! » *woe* reigning supreme within Satan.

If we were to take another passage from Milton or any other writer who has employed like means to enforce his meaning, the result would be the same. (See Appendix II.)

Here is another passage from Browning's « *Sordello* » in which Antitheses and Repetitions are made use of to the advantage of the sense (Book IV the verses 265-3)

..... He felt

An *error*, an exceeding *error* melt
While he was occupied with Mantuan chants
Behoved him *think* of men, and take their *wants*
Such as he, now, distinguished every side,
As his *own want* which might be satisfied,
And after that *think* of rare qualities
Of his *own* soul demanding exercise
It followed naturally, through no claim
On *their* part, which made virtue of the aim
At serving *them*, on *his*, *that* past retrieve,
He felt *now* in *their* toils, — nor could leave
Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule
Impress *his* will on mankind, *he* (the fool !)
Had never even entertained the *thought*
That, this, *his* last arrangement, might be fraught
With incidental good to *them* as well,
And that mankind's delight could help to swell
His own

One cannot find fault with his repeating the noun

now / « *error* » twice, to show *great* it was, nor is the repetition of the verb « *think* » any less necessary, as he had been for so long in a state of simple *perception* up to a certain age, (see beginning of book II), without deep *thought*.

And *now* (repeated also to show a new direction taken) only he realizes that Humanity is one half of himself and its *wants* (repeated), are his *own* (repeated also), he has *thought* (verse 237) at last of the *service* he could do to men, and by doing good to *them*, *further* his own happiness.

Once more, then, we are forced to admit the care Browning has shown in insisting forcibly on his main ideas and his address in linking all firmly and closely together.

Endless examples could be given, but we prefer simply referring the reader to passages where — when once he has become accustomed to Browning's tricks of style — he will find his way easily through his sentences and appreciate his method of enforcing his meaning. Also in Book IV. See for instance ; Insistence on the Pronouns throughout verses 452, 470 : *that, those, that, that, their, these, him, them, they, his, his, himself, he*, etc...

and compare with play upon pronoun « I » in Book III, lines 142-192 as well as with Book V, verses 473-619.

Book IV. — Verses 585 to 612 where insistence is laid on the word « man », « men », purposely to show what a *man of men* Taurello was.

Book IV — 695-850, where every exclamation and interjection possible is made use of to show the vivacity Taurello displays : Ay ! Bacchus ! Ah ! So ! Glee ! Safe !

Ah ! Ah ! Brave ! Hell ! How now ? Ay ! Ay ! Why !
No ! Nay ! Fate, Fate, Fate ! How now ?

It is when we come to examine Browning's style very closely that we realize that it is singularly like that of all great, passionate, and ardent natures. It has extreme vigour combined with conciseness, and it makes most frequent use of the « Orator's » two main means of enforcing his meaning : i.e. Repetition and Antitheses.

Thus it is that in the finest passages throughout « *Sordello* » a most wonderful effect is obtained by the subtle combination of all the means that Rhetoric places at the disposal of a powerful mind gifted with the art of skilfully making use of them.

Thus what appears *redundancy* in Browning is in reality the counterpart of the Synthesis he elsewhere makes use of and which by *opposition* enables him to draw attention to what he wishes more especially to impress upon his reader.

By his manner he comes in this respect so very close to Shakespeare, Milton, and many other very great and very passionate natures, that if we choose, at random, passages from these writers we shall at once be struck by the resemblance between them.

Let us take finally in Milton the passage where he describes Satan, climbing like a wolf into Eden. Here we find the same insistence, the same emphasis, laid on word opposed to one another by repetition and antithesis combined.

As when a prowling wolf,
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey

Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve,
In hurdled cotes amid the fields secure,
Leaps *o'er* the fence with ease *into* the fold ;
Or as a thief, bent to unhoard the cash,
Of some rich burgher, whose substantial doors,
Cross-barred and bolted fast fear no assault,
In at the window *climbs*, *or o'er* the tiles ;
So clomb this first grand Thief *into* God's fold :
Thence up he flew, and on the *tree* of Life,
The middle *tree*, and highest there that grew,
Sat like a cormorant, etc., etc...

STYLE

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Though Aristotle long ago thought that it was useless to distinguish the different species of style we may say that in Browning's « *Sordello* » not only every kind of style that is generally found in Poetry, either the a) Elevated ; b) the Graceful ; c) the Forcible or ; d) the Simple, is found, but also the ; e) Pathetic ; f) and the Descriptive not to mention the ; g) Familiar or Sarcastic.

Thus we find a fine example of :

a) The *Elevated style* in the first lines of Book VI.

And at last

*The main discovery and prime concern,
All that just now imported him to learn,
Truth's self, like yonder slow moon to complete
Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet
Lighted his old Life's every shift and change, etc...*

wherein all is majestic and powerful.

VI 26-50.

b) The *Graceful style* :

Some happy lands that have luxurious names,
For loose fertility, a footfall there
Suffices to upturn to the warm air
Half germinating spices ; mere decay
Produces richer life and day by day
New pollen on the lily-petal grown
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose I 470-475.

c) The *Forcible style* is used when for instance Taurello the man of action speaks :

« I point

How easy t'were to twist, once out of joint.
The socket from the bone ; my Azzo's stare
Meanwhile ! for I, this idle strap to wear
Shall — fret myself abundantly, what end
To serve ? » IV-788-800.

d) *Simple style* :

In this castle may be seen
On the hill-tops, or underneath the vines,
Or eastward by the mound of firs or pines
That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,
A slender boy in a loose page's dress etc...
I. 444-460.

e) The *Pathetic style* is used to describe a death scene
Say, that of a) Retrude or of b) Sordello, eg. :

a) though pain

Was fled, and what assured them most t'was fled
All pain, was when they raised the pale crushed head
Twould turn it this way and that, waver awhile

And only settle into its old smile
i / (Graceful as the disquieted flag
Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag
On either side their path when suffered look
Down on her child. V. 5.

b) The wide eyes,
Wider than some spent swimmer, if he spies
Help from above, in his extreme despair
And head for back on shoulder thrust, turns there
With short quick passionate cry. VI 615-618.

But it is in his Descriptive passages that Browning's style is at its best, because it comprises at the same time, his clearest, most vivid and most beautiful way of expressing himself.

DESCRIPTIVE STYLE

William Allingham who became later one of Browning's fastest friends had been advised by Leigh Hunt to make the acquaintance of the author of « *Paracelsus* ». The young Irishman returned full of enthusiasm after his first visit and declared Browning to be the *Turner* of Poets.

A closer examination of Browning's descriptive style in « *Sordello* » than is generally made, shows that, strong as the term may appear at first sight, it was hardly exaggerated.

Browning was a passionate admirer of all that was Oriental and the intensity of the Eastern hues is to be found in most of the pictures he gives us, not only of Italian landscapes but of Exotic countries.

Vivid splashes of colours are what mainly characterize these pictures :

Let us take for instance the description of the setting-sun over Verona in Book I.

A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson (1), as a brand
The woods beneath lay black (I. 81-84)

The *long flare of crimson* against the black wood is particularly like those we notice in Turner.

Here is another effect of light on water.

With flashing water through and through ; ashine
Thick-steaming, all *alive* ;

with further on

the rainbow-vapour...

Each footfall burst up... in the moorish floor
A diamond jet.

He is particularly fond of portraying the *refraction* of
light.

Compare the description of the spider's-web (I.665) :

« All his waving mesh

Laughing in the lucid dew drops rainbow edged ».

The sun piercing the clouds.

Looks *fervid* through..... I. 482.

This *human* aspect of things is always to be noted, for we find again the *water* with the same term :

Mincio, in its place,

(1) Compare the *blazing* west, III-955.

Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face

With the same dazzling reverberation :

And where the mists broke up immense and white
In the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light
Out of the crushing of a myriad stars » (III, 86-90).

Not only is the light of *day* rendered with force but
also that of *night* :

Thorn rows

Alive (1) with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire (III,
104-105).

In the forest (I-920) each clump is « *glistering* ».

In Book II I-13 the leaflets are « *pink* », and the larches
« *brighten* » ; the smoke is « *green* » against the *black*
pines ; a little lower down the : sundawn « *feeds the stalks*
of withered fern with gold » ; the shimmering of the
water is rendered with all of Turner's art : it is ablaze
with light :

« *The Morass*

Shot every side.

Glowing like the moon,

One mild flame (III. 600-601).

A meagre and discoloured moon. (IV 887).

..... lines

The moon breaks through, a gray *mean* scale against
V. 1018

And only one spot left from out the night

(1) Notice that the adjective used is the same as that above.
when speaking of the *water*.

Glimmered upon the river opposite (VI, 8-10).

Thus like Dante, in his Divine Comedy, Browning contrasts light and shade, and like Turner covers his canvas with the most gorgeous tints.

G *Sarcastic Style* :

See, for instance, how well he renders Taurello's contempt for Sordello's rhetoric.

*« To think such speech could fix
Taurello ! »* (V. 361).

Or, elsewhere chaffs Sordello and brings out his ludicrous vanity

As pigmy natures as you please
So much the better for you, take your ease
Look on and laugh ! style yourself God alone
Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone ! (II-419)

For the « Monarch of the world » is, in reality :

Puny, uncouth, ailing

« and lean, outworn and really old » (IV 421)

He can rail at Naddo's flattery :

Or Naddo's sanctimonious ways.

« And Naddo looked an angel and the rest

Angels, and all these angels would be blest (IV-479)

Supremely ».

He laughs at himself and his own profession with frank irony :

That's after all a freak,

The having eyes to see, and tongue to speak (II-505-506)

There is bitter contempt in :

Are this, and this, and this, the shining ones ? V-10

Taurello vivaciously reveals the nobility of his character in a few words :

« How now ! Compete

With my old comrade, Shuffle from their seat

His children ? Paltry dealing ! » IV 840-842

Browning's narrative style is rapid and forcible ;

« Into the thick Elcorte leapt

Saved her, and died » II 330-331.

And yet this same author in the same work can treat of the deepest metaphysical subjects. See, for instance, how abstruse and difficult his paragraph, in Book VI, verses 588 to 603, appears at first sight when explaining that love, diviye and human were what *Sordello* was most in need of :

Ah my Sordello ! etc.

Here, if we re-establish the words understood we get the quintessence of Browning's own loving, passionate, nature, which is as near that of Christ's as is possible to imagine making the whole passage tremulous with tenderness.

SIMILES AND METAPHORS

Many of Browning's Similes and Metaphors are drawn from Nature, by far the greater number are comparisons made with *human creatures* (1). This is also the case in the

- (1) Browning sees personality in everything, because in his eyes everything has a *soul*. Thus it is that many of his similes are drawn not only from human beings but from objects generally considered as lifeless. (see for instance Bk. VI (102) « Midday woods are fraught with fervour »).

best of his later poems. His love for *animals* is to be noted in this connection, In « *Saul* » alone, nineteen animals form part of the landscape.

In « *Sordello* » this love of human creatures, beginning and ending in *Man* is very manifest.

Thus in Book I he compares the marble of the font in the castle of Goïto to Eve's flesh :

Just tinged marble, like Eve's liliated flesh
Beneath her maker's finger, when the fresh
First pulse of life, shot brightening the snow. I. 413-416
For him the peasant girls he perceives at Venice are
more beautiful than the pigeons that flutter about St
Mark's :

These,

Perhaps from our delicious Asolo,
Who twinkle, pigeons on the portico
Not prettier. III 682-683.

But even when Nature furnishes him with his comparisons some human aspect is recalled :

The resin oozing from the pine-tree is compared to tears running down a cheek :

Those pale fragrant tears where Zephirs stanch
March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch.

III 40-43

He speaks of the « heart » of the *groaning monster*, the rock balanced on its basaltic bed.

The comparison with « *song* », that is to render *Sordello's* every shade of feeling, is perfectly adequate.

Higher up in the scale of life we come to trees which are spoken of as « *querelous* ». A querelous fraternity of pines (2) (11 - 953)

Elsewhere *Sordello* looks at the « *sick, expostulating trees* » (2).

The trees themselves are likened to a young witch (1) :
As in the slumbrous heart o' the woods

Our buried year, a witch, grew young again... III 4-6

When the moon comes out it looks like a human face :

The Moon came out, like features of a face II 952.

The expanse of sky reflecting the water, and the water
reflecting the sky are compared to the wings of an angel :

One richness where they mixed

As this and that wing of an angel VI. 11-13.

Very rarely is a concrete object compared to something
abstract :

Truth's self like yonder slow moon. VI 29-30.

Venice seems a type

Of Life 'twixt blue and blue extends a stripe

As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt naught and
naught III 723, 727

Sordello's sensitiveness is compared to a wave :

His sensitiveness idled, now amort,

Alive now, and, to sullenness or sport

Given wholly up, disposed itself anew

At every passing instigation, grew

And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers split,

Wedge like insisting, quivered now a gilt

Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race

Of whitest ripples o'er the reef. VI 46-52.

Elsewhere Browning refers to birds : Osprey I. 128 ;
Eagles VI, 605 ; Lark VI 866 ; King Bird VI 583 ; Bird's
flutter III, 306 ; Pigeons (already noticed) III 680 : to

(1) Cf. IV. 119 (made fools of) « *tamed* ».

the asp, VI, 348 ; to a hound, V, 880 ; to the Spider I 665 ; the bat : II 227, He even refers to insects : Scarab II-90 ; Palmer-worm, I 632 ; Hermit bee V-1025 ; Plants and trees : Water-flag ; V 787 ; Pompion-roots ; II 780. Dwarf-palm IV 360 Spice tree : II 966, 970 ; Vines ; II 980. V 1020 Fruits : VI 845 ; cone II 145.

More varied comparisons are found also : A war engine is compared to a King : IV, 48 ; Discursive thoughts of Taurello compared with those of an Ethiopian fugitive IV 854, 885.

It is very rare however that his metaphors extend beyond a few lines and some of the best are contained in only one or two lines :

Sea-like that people, hurrying to and fro. III 289

Like the bird's flutter, ere it fix and feed III, 310

His upreared palace, like a threat, III 468

As leaves a blade its heft. III, 482.

The sun reared a head like the first

Clamberer who peered atop the Capitol. III, 591.

My rhymes that spring

Like an escape of angels. III, 596.

CARLYLE'S AND DANTE'S INFLUENCE IN BROWNING'S *SORDELLO*

Although it is not possible to point out all the influences of Carlyle's and Dante's style on Browning in « *Sordello* » we may briefly add that many of Carlyle's philosophical terms have passed bodily from « *Sartor Resartus* » into the various passages of « *Sordello* » when it is question of Time, Eternity, Good, Evil, Sphere, Space, etc. with even hints of Carlyle's Hero-worship at times, see for ins-

tance the passage in Book I, 540, 555 and 558, 567 — Compare III-982 — V. 86-90 and above all passim in Book VI, I-600.

As for Dante, his influence may be seen in the terser style adopted by Browning, his freer use of familiar striking terms, as well as, images and metaphors drawn from every conceivable source in Nature which are essentially Dantesque in character (1).

(1) Notice the particular style of his Invocation of Dante and description of Hell, Book I. verse 360-374.

CONCLUSION

If we now endeavour to sum up the result of our examination of Browning's English in the preceding paragraphs, we can conclude — in spite of adverse criticism, — greatly in Browning's favour for :

First of all from the point of view of *Economy* of Expression, it is clear that he was not entirely to blame : he strove to satisfy criticism that was not barely — if at all, — justified in the case of his « *Paracelsus* », and found in so doing more than one personal reason : his mind, in power of comprehension and expression, was rapid and vivid in the extreme, and he had thus a pretext given him for expressing himself with extreme concision and vividness ; again, he was Elizabethan by taste and temperament and Shakespeare's language was to him a pleasing vehicle to transmit his thought, and finally his own ardent, caustic, passionate nature caused him to seek an outlet for his pent-up energy in sharp explosive outcries that were at times too sudden and impetuous for him to pay attention to grammatical forms. And lastly it should not be forgotten that a real advantage was derived from this curtailing and compression, for a sparkling, vigorous terseness is, more often than not, the final outcome. His various *Ellipses* cannot be severely criticized when once one turns to compare them with the cumberous sentences

of the divines of the 17 th century, or, to take Poetry, with those of Shakespeare himself, Milton or Tennyson.

His shortening of prepositions, articles and words in general is essentially Shakespearan, and to be found in all poets more or less. His *Absolute Forms* recur in common speech, and are characteristic of the genius of the English language. And Milton's are far more audacious, being very often purely Latin forms, simply transferred into the English tongue. The same may be said of Browning's *Inversions* (1), they too occur most frequently in ordinary speech. His *Accidence* is rarely irregular if we take into consideration his knowledge of older English which at that time he knew more about than most people did. His *Semantics* are justified for the same reason, though, at first sight, they excite surprise. His greatest sin against clearness of expression is his combining *Brackets and Parentheses, Dashes and Elliptical Forms all in one and the same passage*. But, even here, a little patience will give a clue to the unravelling of his thought.

Secondly, as to his *Redundancy* : we can exonerate him also, for we realize finally that the qualities entailed by it are greater than the defects which seem, at first sight, frequent. For it enables him to reach unparalleled power of expression. By a skilful combining of Repetition and Antithesis he is able to stress fully his meaning and draw from them every help that the art of Rhetoric is

(1) Even in « *Paracelsus* », one can find only one inversion that is perfectly unacceptable, a) and there is, in reality, only one construction in « *Sordello* » too awkward to be decently admitted ; (Sordello Book II - v. 630)
« Had Montfort at, completely, (so to speak) his finger's ends.

capable of furnishing. His method is that of all the greatest artists, be they Poets, Musicians or Painters.

Throughout his work, we are, no doubt, surprised by the alternative humour, conversational tone, sarcasm, modesty ; then, after these, his striking ellipses, inversions, dashes, parentheses. But, why should there not be a connexion between these characteristics ? One explaining the other ? Why should repetition in an author be only a sign of carelessness ? Why not intentional, and, if intentional, to what end ? Knowing Browning as we do, and that he strenuously denied having ever been wilfully careless or abstruse, knowing too his ardent nature, we may surmise that he wished, by all these various means, to enforce something, by the stress he lays on certain terms or certain forms of speech, and such indeed is the case.

All along, we find him striving, with his intense earnestness, to make the deeper meaning of his poems clear by every artifice of rhetoric, by every licence of language he can imagine, allowing himself, only at times, to indulge in the fashioning, for pure beauty's sake, of a limited number of harmonious lines.

His style appears, in the light of his main intention, singularly adequate to the purpose he aims at, above all, when one feels that the frequent repetitions, ellipses, inversions, the sudden interrogations, the caustic passing remarks, the humour, the rapidity, all serve their earnest purpose, whilst they are, all of them glowing proofs of the author's own powerful vitality and extreme subtlety of expression and thought.

Thus however difficult « *Sordello* » may at first appear, we *can* decipher it, that is if we take sufficient pains, if

we read each book in the light of the others and explain each line by the general context, for, in a true work of art, as in the human body, the whole depends upon the Parts, and the Parts in their turn, depend upon the Whole.

Let us, then, cease carping at Browning, even if we fancy there are some faults in his work, these apparent faults of language are far less numerous than is thought, and not the result of carelessness, not of a weak and confused mind, but of a supremely gifted writer who always rewards those who patiently examine his work and..... reflect.

The study of Browning's English in « *Sordello* » presents not merely a Grammatical interest : when once we have got at the exact meaning of each sentence we are able to find out the meaning of the work itself, the main thought which prevades it, we then realize how important, how profound is its theme, since it embraces all that concerns man's life here below, with its duties, its sorrows and its joys, man's life, which the poem teaches us should be made up of hope, of love for one's fellow beings, perpetual aspiration towards the thing which Browning himself ever strove to attain and for the sake of which *Sordello* gave up his own life : Truth.

APPENDIX I

Past and Present Criticisms of « *Sordello* ».

I

« *Sordello* » passes to be the most difficult of all Browning's works to interpret.

That, up to the present, the critics have been with very few exceptions uniformly severe on it, will appear evident if first of all we quote, in chronological order, the opinions they have at different times expressed.

★★

One of the severest, made shortly after the appearance of the poem was that of Horne (R. H.) in his « *Spirit of the Age* » 1844.

« To that somewhat extensive class of readers » — says he — « who are of opinion that poetry, so far from being a thing to study should be so plain that « all who run may read », (1) and who take up the work of Mr. Browning with that view, we should premise that they might just as well run another way. In « *Paracelsus* » the difficulties were in the quantity and quality of thought : in « *Sordello* » there is the additional difficulty of an im-

(1) Browning recalls the expression twenty years later in the introduction to « *The Ring and the Book* » : « That all who run may read ». Showing that he had not forgotten the reproach.

practicable style. In proportion to the depth or novelty of a thought, the poet has chosen to render the vehicle difficult in which it is conveyed — sometimes by its erudite elaboration of parenthesis within parenthesis, and question upon query — sometimes by its levity, jaunty indifference, and apparent contempt of everything, sometimes it has an interminable period, or one, the right end of which you cannot find : a knotted serpent, which, either has no discoverable tail, or has several, the ends of which are in the mouth of other serpents, or else flanking in the air — sometimes it has a series of the shortest possible periods, viz : of one word, or of two or three words. And, amidst all this, there is at frequent intervals a dark hailstone shower of proper names of men and women, and places, and idealities, with which only one general reader in about twenty thousand can be expected to be familiar, and with the whole of which the style of the poet seems, courteously, to assume that all his readers are upon the most familiar terms possible. Under these circumstances, it can be no wonder that such of the miscellaneous public as take up a poem by the way of a little relaxation shrunk back in hopeless dismay : nor that the more numerous class of daily and weekly critics, whose judgments are, from the very nature of their position, compelled in most cases to be as hasty as their hands, which « write against time », should have been glad to dismiss « *Sordello* » in an angry paragraph. In a few instances the critics appeared to have read portion of it ; in the great majority of instances it was not read at all, which fact was evident in the notice, and in several instances was boldly declared by the irate critic as a task beyond his sublunary powers ».

Horne continues in this style for several pages, at times jauntily comparing « *Sordello* » to Keats' *Endymion* and Shelly's « *Prometheus Unbound* » « put as he says, into rhyme », and again, « to the suggestive voluble, disconnected, philosophical jargon of Shakespeare's fools ».

Even before this severe criticism, « *The Spectator* » had declared that : « It is not necessary to wade all through a mud-puddle to become aware that it is a mud-puddle. What this poem may be in its extent, we are unable to say, for we cannot read it. Whatever may be the poetical spirit of Mr. Browning, it is overlaid in « *Sordello* » by digression, affectation, obscurity, and all the faults that spring, it would seem, from crudity of plan to self-opinion, which neither cull thoroughly, nor revise composition, so that the reader, at least the reader of our stamp, turns away ».

The « *Atlas* » affirmed that the poem was « worse than « *Stafford* ». That drama had shown a descent from the high promise of « *Paracelsus* », in this third production, however all the faults of the first were exhibited in an intensified form, without the compensation of an equal amount of excellence in any single point of view. He is further chargeable with betraying the disagreeable truth that the author has not only benefited nothing from experience, but that the sins of his verse are premeditated, wilful, and incurable » (1).

« *The Athenaeum* » (2) spoke in the severest terms of the mannerisms of the poem, of its peculiarities of lan-

(1) March 28th 1840.

(2) May 3^d 1840.

guage, of its disregard of euphony, of its occupying the reader's attention with novelties of construction, which he must master in order to grasp the meaning lost to apprehension in cloudy depths.

Moreover several of Browning's own friends had shown the same incomprehension of the poet's method and meaning :

« Browning's system of composition », declared *Mars-ton*, « is to write down on a slate in prose what he wants to say, and then to turn it into verses, striving after the greatest amount of condensation : thus if an exclamation will suggest his meaning he substitutes this for a whole sentence ».

Carlyle, though an admirer of Browning, wrote that his wife was reading « *Sordello* » with great interest, but could not make out whether « *Sordello* » was a man, a poem or a city ! »

Tennyson, himself, was reported to have said he only understood two lines in the whole poem : the first : « Who will may hear *Sordello*'s story told », the second : « Who would, has heard *Sordello*'s story told », and that they were both lies.

Elizabeth Barrett in her correspondence with Robert Browning wrote :

« I *have* been thinking much of your « *Sordello* »
« since you spoke of it. And even I *had* thought much of
« it yesterday, feeling that it might be thrown out into
« light by your hand, and greatly justify the additional
« effort. It is like a noble picture with its face to the wall
« just now — or at least in the shadow. And so worthy
« as it is of you in all ways ! Individual all through, you

« have made even the darkness of it ! And such a work
« as it might become if you chose... if you put your will
« to it ! What I meant to say yesterday was, not that it
« wanted more additional verses than the « ten per cent »
« you spoke of... though it does perhaps... so much as that
« (to my mind) it wants drawing together and fortifying
« in the connections and associations... which hang as
« loosely every here and there, as those in a dream, and
« confound the reader who persists in thinking himself
« awake. » (Correspondence, tome I, page 193) (1).

But even previous to her knowing Browning she hailed him as the « King of the Mystics ». A year before her marriage she confessed to a correspondent that she herself was « guilty of the sin of spinxine literature and had struggled hard to renounce it » : « Do you know », she added, plaintively, « I have been told that I have written things harder to interpret than Browning himself ? Only I can not, can not, believe it, he is so very hard » (2).

Lowell, in an article published by *The North American Review* (April 1848), after having admitted the excellence of detached passages in « *Sordello* » declared : « It was a fine poem before the author wrote it ; we may as

- (1) Browning, who constantly refused to pay any attention to ordinary criticism thought his wife was his best critic and in fact endeavoured twice later on (1856), to do what she asked. She had written again in October saying : « what about the new avatar of « *Sordello* » which you taught me to look for ? »
- (2) The Letters of Elizabeth Browning (1898, New-York). Compare what Kingsley puts into the mouth of Alton Locke's friend : « She talked about poetry, Tennyson and Wordsworth and asked me if I understood Browning's *Sordello* and she comforted me, after my stammering confession that I did not, by telling me she did not understand it either ».

well say, bluntly, it is totally incomprehensible as a connected whole ».

Dean Church, in his article on « *Sordello* » wrote :

« Readers, and even Students of Browning shy at *Sordello*... and Mr. Browning himself calls his poem a Quixotic attempt. Perplexity, bewilderment, is not the word to express the state of feeling which comes over the reader when he first opens the book... His first reading leaves him aghast. Where is he, and what is he among ? He is to hear a story told. The story begins, stops for a parenthesis, stops for an address to Shelley, proceeds, breaks off, goes back at a jump thirty years, and we are transported or rather have to find our way to an entirely different scene and different associations and so, by hints, pictures and enigmas, to yet another set of circumstances which follow like slides in a magic lantern... And then the language is like unpointed Hebrew words, where you have the consonants and, according as you know the language, put in the vowels. Ellipsis reigns supreme : prepositions and relatives are dispensed with : nominatives and accusatives play hide-and-seek round verbs : we get lost in the maze of transpositions and stumble over irritating and obscure parentheses. And then illustrations and allusions ! Sismondi and Milman will give us the history of the time, — not quite the same as Mr. Browning's — but something like ; the only thing that does not seem arbitrary is the geography. Mr. Browning is moreover a wide reader, and draws his illustrative materials from sources locked and sealed to us outsiders ! »

And here is what Jowett, the caustic Master of Balliol, thought of Browning and his work as late as in 1887 :

« He is a very extraordinary man ; very generous and truthful and quite incapable of correcting his literary faults, which, at first, sprang from carelessness and an uncritical habit and now are born and bred in him. He has no form, or has it only by accident when the subject is limited. His thought and feeling and knowledge are generally out of all proportion to his powers of expression ».

Such an appreciation from a man of Jowett's learning is curious, but it is likely he had formed, as many other intelligent people did, his opinion *before* reading the poet's work.

Again M. Lounsbury in his « *Early Literary Career of Browning* » in speaking of « *Sordello* » writes :

« It has all the worst qualities of Browning's style. Rugged versification, abrupt transition we are prepared to put up with in all his pieces, but in this poem, these peculiarities of diction are carried to the extreme. The liberty taken with expression often more than approaches lawlessness ; it is lawlessness itself. As one illustration out of several, phrases and sometimes clauses are inserted into sentences, necessarily breaking the continuity of the thought. Sparingly introduced, these, if brief, may be no blemish ; sometimes they are a positive ornament. But it is an essential condition of their value that they should be introduced only sparingly. In « *Sordello* » they not only appear often, but sometimes in the most aggravated — and to use a modern colloquialism — in the most aggravating form. In more than one instance the intercalary sentence, which occupies the middle of another, consists of several lines. Necessarily, the reader fails to carry in his

mind, amidst this pressure of intrusive matter, what the author has been talking about previously. Consequently, when he arrives at the jumping-off place of the remarks inserted, he has to retrace his steps and go back to where he left off in order to resume the connection of thought. This usage is bad enough in prose ; in poetry it is absolutely intolerable. It could never be resorted to by the conscious literary artist. »

« This, however, is but a single one of the fatal defects which beset expression in « *Sordello* ». The poem fails in a number of other and more essential things which go to constitute poetry. There it stops short. You may call it metaphysical, psychological, intellectual problematical, profoundly thoughtful, what indeed you will. But never once does it fulfil the function for which poetry exists. It never once stirs the heart, it never once uplifts the soul. As an aid to mental discipline, as an incitement to the efforts of those who have, or fancy they have, penetrated its mystery and thereby achieved an intellectual victory against great odds, it may be regarded as fulfilling a valuable function. But by those who believe that the first business of a poem is to be poetical, it will never be regarded otherwise than as a failure. It will remain a colossal derelict upon the sea of literature, inflicting damage upon the strongest intellects that graze it even slightly, and hopelessly wrecking the frailer mental craft that come into full collision with it — at least such is the impression one gets from the essays written upon it » (1).

Therein lies precisely the mistake made by M. Louns-

(1) Robert Browning's Early Literary Career 1912.

bury, he has read the essays written upon « *Sordello* » and not, as he should have done, reread « *Sordello* » itself, pen in hand, and with due concentration.

Mr. Stopford Brooke also complained : (1)

« *Sordello* is obscure. Browning's idolaters say, by concentration of thought. It is rather obscure by want of that wise rejection of unnecessary thought, which is the true concentration. It is obscure, by a host of parentheses introduced to express thoughts which are only suggested, half shaped, and which are frequently interwoven with parentheses. It is obscure by the worst punctuation I ever came across, but this was improved in the later editions. It is obscured by multitudinous fancies put in, whether they have to do with the subject or not, and by multitudinous deviations within these fancies. It is obscure, by Browning's effort to make words express more than they are capable of expressing ! »

And finally, here is *M. Elton's* opinion : (2)

« Few genuine poets have insulted art more strenuously than Browning does in « *Sordello* ». With an effort, the story can be made out ; the thing has been done. But no comment and no undeniable oases can redeem « *Sordello* ». Dante, who had set the figure of the poet-patriot in the clear immortal light of his Purgatory, inspired Browning, but failed to instruct him. Browning buried himself in the obscure history of the time, assumed that every one knew it, interwove it with the spiritual drama, treated it with all licence, and so hid away *Sordello* himself in a

(1) In his « *Poetry of Browning* » (1900).

(2) *English Literature*, 1924.

dense thicket of allusion. Sordello is another baffled aspirant, with his hungry mind fixed on all life and knowledge for its prey. At last he perishes in a conflict between love and ambition. The conception deserves a better fate : but in spite of the flashes of beauty that flit over the scene whenever Palma, Sordello's love, appears, the poem suffocates itself ».

Such is the typical kind of criticism prevailing in England even at the present time.

II

It is refreshing, after reading these criticisms, to turn to the more genial appreciations of Browning's work. Thus, shortly after *The « Spectator »* and *« The Atlas »* had poured contempt on « Sordello » a writer (1) who is undeservedly forgotten at present, was making of « Sordello » an excellent and sympathetic review :

« The higher the poetry, the fuller, deeper, its spirit », said he, *« the more consummate and individual its expression, the fewer those competent to receive and welcome it, and the greater the obstacles to its reception, even among these... In the right apprehension and faithful account of contemporaneous greatness, consists the highest work of criticism properly so called... Without study, actual bonafide study, his poetry must remain caviar to the most intelligent reader... Yet, to our mind, this is a great and original poet... His poetic genius is essentially recondite, and its expression could be nothing less... His assuredly*

(1) Cyrus Edmunds; *Eclectic Review* 1849 XX-203-204 (Edmunds is the author of an excellent study on Milton's Prose Works).

must rank as a new manifestation of poetic art. With no modern poet are we conversant, in whom less of resemblance to others can be traced. None stands more absolutely self-entire and independent. It is plain, that to be genuine and true, was rightly, his great aim. That the
a/realization should square with every chance reader's apprehension, rested not with him. Popular or not, he must be a poet after his own fashion, if at all... Those very poems : such as *Sordello*, *Pippa Passes*, in respect to which, the loudest complaints of obscurity have been raised, are precisely those, in which the fullest wealth of poetry, the highest creative power, have been realized (p. 207) Robert Browning is not one whom we can recommend to the readers of poetry at their ease : gentlemen who would have their hour's amusement out of their poet... we should doubt whether any could be competent to speak of Browning, till having given him a second reading, or fully to estimate him till after, at least, three readings (p. 208)... We ourselves must confess to having gone through our first reading of *Sordello* with feelings, for the most part, of unmingled perplexity, occasionally passing into angry despair. Not till we had entered on the second reading, did we begin to apprehend its scope or unity, or see the exceeding beauty of its parts. But now, in its subtle, yet broadly-marked development of character — whether drawn at full, as of the dreamy, irresolute aspirer, *Sordello* himself, or of the showy prompt, decisive man of action, the warrior *Salinquer* or sketched in brief, at few and slight touches, as of the glorious creature *Palma* — a far-off shining in the poet's golden shadowing of her beauty, spiritual and material, — and of the fervent poet, *Eglamour*,

type of his class : in its consummate wealth of general purely poetic thought and imaginative beauty flooding the whole, the poem stands before us as the most splendid representative conceivable of all that can be attained by the union with the purely poetic embodiment of highest thoughtful aspiration of the fullest luxury of glowing and passionately imaginative vitality ».

In 1867 appeared E. Dowden's thoughtful and appreciative article in *Fraser's Magazine* (1) wherein he says, concerning the style :

« One word on the obscurity of *Sordello*. It arises not so much from peculiarities of style, and the involved structure of occasional sentences (...as a rule, the style of *Sordello* is vigorously straightforward), as from the unre-laxing demand which is made, throughout, upon the intellectual and imaginative energy and alertness of the reader. The truth is, Mr. Browning has given too much in his couple of hundred pages : there is not a line of the poem which is not as full of matter as a line can be ; so that if the ten syllables sometimes seem to start and give way under the strain, we need not wonder. We come to no places in « *Sordello* » where we can rest and dream or look up at the sky. Ideas, emotions images, analyses, descriptions, still come crowding on. There is too much of everything ; we cannot see the wood for the trees. Towards the end of the third book Mr. Browning interrupts the story that he may « pause and breathe ». That is an apt expression ; but Mr. Browning seems unable to slacken the mo-

(1) October 1867 pp. 518-530. The second article was, most unfortunately, refused by Froude.

tion of the mind ; and during this breathing-space heart and brain, perceptive and reflective power, are almost more busily at work than ever » (pp. 518-19).

In 1868 came *J. Nettleship's Essays*, which are often penetrating but often also, far from the mark (1).

Professor Sidney Colvin wrote an Article in the « *Fortnightly* » Review, for October 1871 giving high praise to Browning. But we must wait till 1875 for *Swinburne's « Introduction to the works of George Chapman »*, for the definite appreciation of Browning's style.

And it is, by far, the most genial :

« If there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect, it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind, or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire ! He is something too much the reverse of obscure ; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realise with what spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building-spirit leaps and lightens to and fro backward and forward, as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread, and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought, woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception, and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed ;

(1) *Sordello* occupies pages 155-235 and 279 seq.

and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon, or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway »... etc., etc...

Finally we have Symon's (1) verdict :

« Mr. Browning might say, as his wife said in an early preface : « I never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry, nor leisure for the hour of the poet » — as indeed he has himself said, to much the same effect, in a letter printed many years ago : « I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar or a game at dominoes to an idle man ». But he has not made anything like such a demand on the reader's faculties as people, not readers — seem to suppose. « Sordello » is difficult, « Sordello » itself, in its worst entanglements, is more extricable than many parts of the divine poem in which Dante enshrined the memory of the man Sordello ».

The truth seems to us, to lie nearer to what Edmunds, Dowden, Swinburne, and Symons have thought, than to those who were incompetent to judge because they did not possess sufficient acumen to penetrate his mind or take sufficient pains to read him attentively.

III

Indeed it is very unlikely that, with such a gifted writer as Browning undoubtedly was, only sheer clumsiness and incompetence on his part can be the unique cause of our not understanding him at first sight. Many things go to prove the contrary ; and, besides, did he not himself repeatedly declare that he was a conscientious artist ?

(1) *« An Introduction to Browning », 1886.*

At times he has humourously alluded in many parts of his works to the attacks made upon him ; thus, in « *The Inn Album* » :

« *That bard's a Browning — he neglects the form*

« *But, Ah the sense ! — Ye gods, the weighty sense !* »

In dedicating « *Sordello* » to Milsand 1863, he had said in his Preface :

« *My own faults of expression were many, but with care for a man or book, such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either ? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since. for, I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might — instead of what the few must like but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it* ».

In his Preface to a selection of (his) Poems, he wrote (May 14th) in 1872 :

« *A few years ago, I might have been tempted to say a word in reply to the objections my poetry was used to encounter. Time has kindly co-operated with my disinclination to write the poetry and the criticism besides. The readers I am at last privileged to expect, meet me fully half-way : and if, from the fitting standpoint, they must still « censure me in their wisdom », they have previously « awakened their senses that they may the better judge ». Nor do I apprehend any more charges of being wilfully obscure, unconscienciously careless, or perversely harsh. Having hitherto done my utmost in the art to which my life is a devotion. I cannot engage to increase the effort : but I conceive that there may be helpful light, as well as*

reassuring warmth, in the attention and sympathy I gratefully acknowledge ».

Instead of showing such good temper indeed, Browning might have replied much more acrimoniously to his critics than he did, and shown that if they could not understand him, the fault *might* after all, be theirs.

APPENDIX II

A - Lincoln's second inaugural address

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN : At this *second* appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office *there is less occasion* for an extended *address*, than *there was* at the *first*. *Then* a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. *Now*, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the *nation*, little that is new can be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which *all* else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself ; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to *all*. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the *occasion* corresponding to this four years ago, *all* thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil *war*. *All* dreaded *it* — *all* sought to avert *it*. While the inaugural *address* was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the *Union without war*, insurgent agents were in the city *seeking* to destroy it *without war* — *seeking* to dissolve the *Union*, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated *war* ; but *one* of them would make *war* rather than *let* the nation *survive*,

and *the other* would accept *war* rather than *let it perish*. And the *war* came.

One-eighth of the whole population were coloured *slaves*, not distributed generally over the *Union*, but localized in the Southern part of it. These *slaves* constituted a peculiar and powerful *interest*. All knew that this *interest* was, somehow, the cause of the *war*. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this *interest* was the object for which the insurgents would rend the *Union*, even by *war* ; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it.

Neither party expected for the *war* the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. *Neither* anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. *Each* looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. *Both* read the same Bible and pray to the same *God* ; and *each* invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just *God's* assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces ; but let us *judge* not, that we be not *judged*. The prayers of *both* could not be *answered* — that of *neither* has been *answered* fully.

The Almighty has His own purposes. « *Woe* unto the world because of *offenses* ! for it must needs be that *offenses come* ; but *woe* to that man by whom the *offense cometh* ». If we *shall* suppose that American slavery is one of those *offenses* which, in the providence of *God*, must needs *come*, but which, having continued through *His* appointed time ; *He* now wills to remove, and that *He* gives to both North and South this terrible *war*, as the

woe due to those by whom the *offense came*, *shall we* discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a *living God* always ascribe to Him ? Fondly *do* we hope — fervently *do* we pray — that this mighty scourge of *war* may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it *shall* continue *until* all the wealth piled up be the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil *shall* be sunk, and *until* every drop of blood *drawn* with the *lash shall* be paid by another *drawn* with the *sword*, was as said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, « The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether ».

With malice toward none ; with charity for *all* ; with firmness in the *right*, as *God* gives us to see the *right*, let us strive on *to* finish the work we are in ; *to* bind up the nation's wounds ; *to* care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — *to* do *all* which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with *all nations*.

Vu le 8 Mars 1933.

*Le Doyen de la Faculté des Lettres
de l'Université de Paris,*

H. DELACROIX.

Vu et permis d'imprimer.

Le Recteur de l'Académie de Paris.

CHARLÉTY.

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